15c
In Canada
30 Cents

Adventure

September 1st

SONS of the SWORD

by

GEORGES SURDEZ

Published Twice
a Month

"After every meal"

Rest, relaxation, recreation,
—WRIGLEY'S!

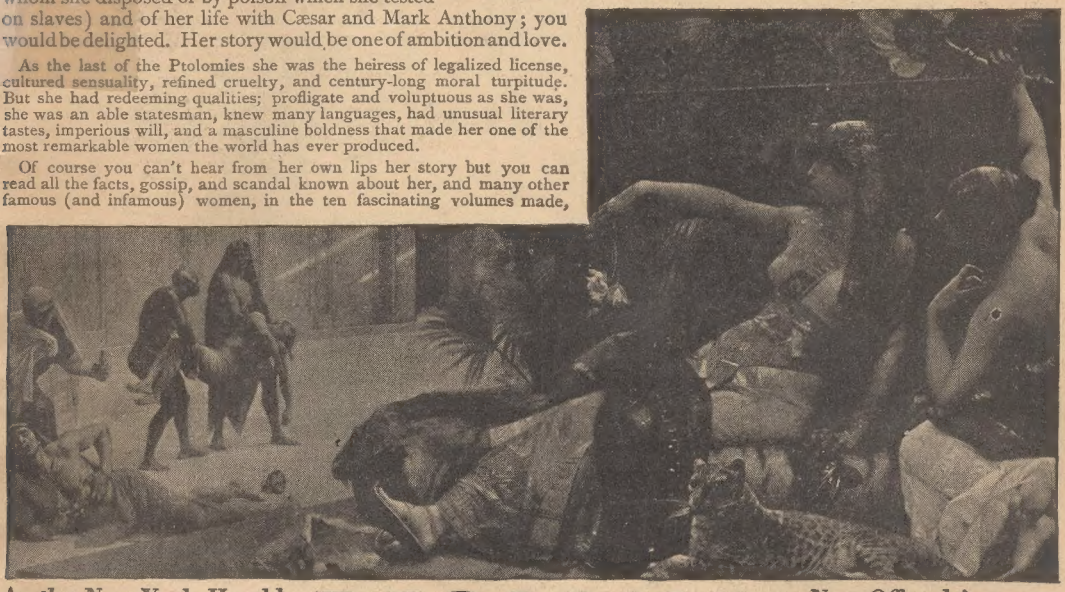
Just the touch of refreshment and lasting good taste that makes any outing perfect.

How Would You Like to Spend an Hour With CLEOPATRA?

IF you could sit down beside this beautiful woman and hear from her own lips the strange story of her marriage to her brothers (one of whom she disposed of by poison which she tested on slaves) and of her life with Cæsar and Mark Anthony; you would be delighted. Her story would be one of ambition and love.

As the last of the Ptolomies she was the heiress of legalized license, cultured sensuality, refined cruelty, and century-long moral turpitude. But she had redeeming qualities; profligate and voluptuous as she was, she was an able statesman, knew many languages, had unusual literary tastes, imperious will, and a masculine boldness that made her one of the most remarkable women the world has ever produced.

Of course you can't hear from her own lips her story but you can read all the facts, gossip, and scandal known about her, and many other famous (and infamous) women, in the ten fascinating volumes made,



As the New York Herald says, by the "Tiffanys of Publishers" on

WOMAN

Now Offered in a Special Low Priced Edition Free on Approval

YOUR CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT WOMAN

Read about the woman who was forced to drink her husband's health from her father's skull and her revenge; how the women of Weinsberg carried their husbands to safety on their shoulders—and why. Learn how Helen of Troy caused a ten years' war—and how a Princess drowned herself to stop further wars over her beauty.

FAMOUS LOVERS

This is your chance to read about the famous lovers, Heloise and Abelard; about Margarida, who unsuspecting ate her lover's heart; and how Emperor Orkham beheaded his beautiful wife Theodora before his ministers who objected because she was a Christian.

HAREMS AND SLAVES

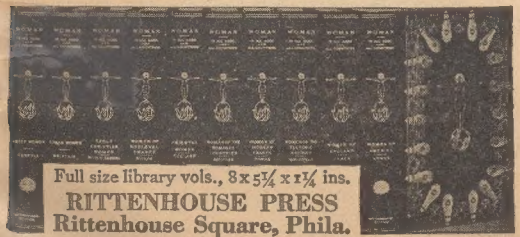
You penetrate the harem with its beautiful slaves. You meet the *hetæræ* with whom the ancient Greeks found solace. You see the Inca Sun Virgins and the famous Vestal Virgins of Rome. You learn about the geisha girls of Japan.

WOMAN—TENDER AND CRUEL

On one hand you have Saint Rosalie and the miracle of roses or Lady Godiva riding naked through Coventry to help her people. On the other you have the Russian countess who, in winter, had water poured over nude girls to make frozen statues for her garden; the French women who sat unmoved as heads dropped from the guillotine; and Empress Irene who blinded her son—yet was made a saint.

MANY CURIOUS STORIES

You read the curious stories of how Princess Eleanor proved to council she was not a leper; how Empress Eudocia was expelled from the palace almost naked; how an emperor's sister was forced to appear in court tied in a bag full of cats which were pricked with pins; and how Empress Helena buried her husband and sons with her own hands to save their bodies from the dogs.



Full size library vols., 8 x 5¼ x 1¼ ins.

RITTENHOUSE PRESS
Rittenhouse Square, Phila.

A FEW OF THE STRANGE TALES

You will read how Emperor Theophilus chose his bride; how the Suliote women, facing dishonorable surrender, jumped to death. You will learn how two gentlemen threw dice to decide which was the father of a child of that beauty, Ninon de Lenclos; of how her son unsuspecting fell in love with her and, learning the truth, shot himself.

YOU MEET FAMOUS WOMEN

You meet Catherine the Great, Jeanne d'Arc, Madame du Barry, Empress Josephine, Marie Antoinette, Nell Gwyn, Messalina, Lucrezia Borgia, the Queen of Sheba, Jezebel, and hundreds of others.

SENSATIONAL SAVINGS TO YOU

The $150.00 limited edition on Japan paper paid for the plates and allows us to offer you this edition, from the same plates, for a fraction of that price. We knew that people would jump to get a set at a low price, so by ordering a large quantity in a slack season we got the lowest cost. But only a few sets remain; soon they will be sold.

COMPLETE SETS FREE ON APPROVAL

We will send you the ten de luxe volumes bound in royal purple cloth stamped in gold. In them you will meet famous women from ancient Carthage, Greece, and Rome; from the harems of Turkey and the slave markets of Babylon, and from the Far East.

GOOD WOMEN AND BAD

You will meet queens, saints, sinners, Amazons, murderers, martyrs, courtesans, bacchantes, and Spartans. Good women and bad—you meet them all. Take advantage of your opportunity. Don't miss it. You get over 4000 pages of pleasure just by signing the coupon.

ACT NOW. DON'T DELAY.

IMPORTANT.

Wise readers will rapidly snap up the last of this edition. To be sure of your set tear off the coupon while you have it in your hand.

SEND NO MONEY

Enjoy these books at our expense for 5 days. If you don't find them entrancing, want them for your library, and think them a wonderful baragain—return them at our expense. But once seen you will want to keep them. MAIL COUPON NOW

THE RITTENHOUSE PRESS
RITTENHOUSE SQUARE, PHILA.

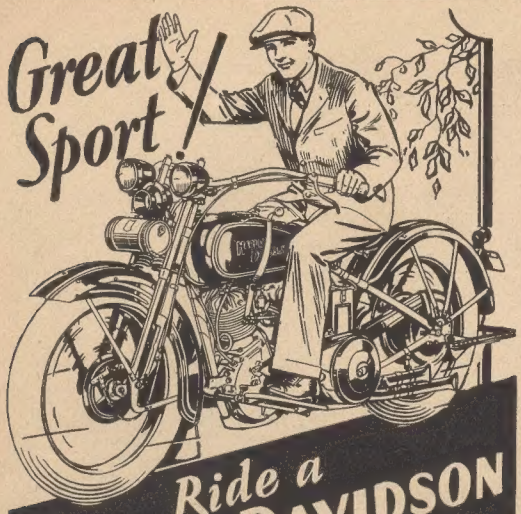
You may send for inspection, charges paid, the 10-vol. set of *WOMAN*, bound in purple cloth. I will return the set in 5 days or send you $2 as a first payment and $3 a month for 9 months.

Canada (duty paid) add one $3 payment. (Adv. 9-28)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

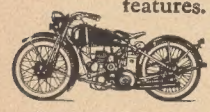
☐ Check here if you wish the maroon Spanish leather finish fabrikoid and change payments to 11 months.



MILES are just minutes of happiness when you're riding a Harley-Davidson. The surge of power under finger-tip control —rush of tonic air in your face— thrilling getaway that sweeps you around and beyond parades of cars —there's nothing like motorcycling!

Join the Jolly Riders! A Harley-Davidson is easy to buy—and costs almost nothing to run. In after-work hours, weekends and vacations you'll find it the best pal you ever had.

The 1929 models are out — with double headlights and many other dandy new features. Ask your dealer about them — and about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.



Mail the Coupon for our latest catalog.

The Single — famous "80 miles per gallon" solo mount, priced at only $235 complete, f. o. b. factory.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR COMPANY
Dept. AF., Milwaukee, Wis.

All models have front and rear brakes, and complete electric equipment. Twins from $290 up, f.o.b.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.,
Dept. AF., Milwaukee, Wis.

Interested in ☐ Twin ☐ Single.
Send catalog and complete details.

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

Two Tales *of* Gayest Humor

LEFT FOOT FIRST, a breezy, amusing tale of gallant modern youth by **Elwood F. Pierce;** and **SADMUSH,** a whimsical, salty tale of the waterfront by **Millard Ward.** Both these stories—and a whole lot more—in the

September

Everybody's **25c**

Where "Good Fellows Get Together"

"In Cleveland it's the Hollenden" is more than a slogan. It is a terse description of the attitude of thousands of discriminating travellers; 1050 comfortable rooms all with homelike surroundings, courteous service and good food is the reason. Make the Hotel Hollenden your headquarters when in Cleveland. Rates, $3.00 and upwards.

In Cleveland-it's The
HOLLENDEN
Theo. DeWitt, Mgr.
Superior Avenue at East Sixth Street

? PILES ?

ITCHING, pain ended with this famous modern non-surgical treatment. Try *Unguentine Pile Cones* today. Made by the makers of Unguentine. At your druggist's—75c. Trial FREE. Write The Norwich Pharmacal Co., Norwich, N. Y.

TRAVEL FOR UNCLE ★ SAM ★

Be RAILWAY POSTAL CLERK, $158-$225 month; travel, see your country. Short hours, pleasant work, paid vacations, steady—no strikes. Experience unnecessary. For details, write Norton Inst., 1402 Temple Court, Denver, Colo.

ADVENTURE
Sept. 1st, 1928

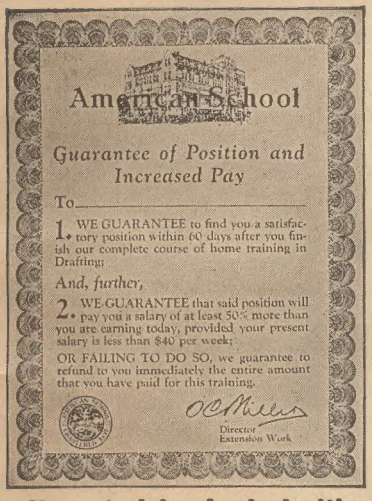
Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois.

Volume 67
Number 6

3 Drafting Lessons Actually free!

* Mail the Coupon

~to prove you can learn at Home, in spare time!


American School
Guarantee of Position and Increased Pay
To
1 WE GUARANTEE to find you a satisfactory position within 60 days after you finish our complete course of home training in Drafting;
And, further,
2 WE GUARANTEE that said position will pay you a salary of at least 50% more than you are earning today, provided your present salary is less than $40 per week;
OR FAILING TO DO SO, we guarantee to refund to you immediately the entire amount that you have paid for this training.
Director Extension Work

Home-training backed with an agreement to get you a DRAFTING JOB at a 50% RAISE—or money refunded

We have developed a new simplified, rapid way to teach Drafting, and we want to send you three sample lessons *without cost or obligation.* So you can test your own ability to master this fascinating work at home, in your spare time. And see for yourself how quickly and easily *you* can qualify for a fine well-paid Drafting position.

$50 to $125 a week paid to EXPERT DRAFTSMEN!

Pick up the want ads of any big-city newspaper and you'll see why we urge men to go into Drafting. 70,000 fine positions advertised in the past year. Draftsmen are urgently needed in Building Construction, Manufacturing, in the Architectural, Mechanical, Electrical, Structural and Automotive industries. Get in touch with me, and I'll tell you how *you* can get one of these fine jobs.

Come Into Drafting!

The ability to read blueprints and draw plans is the entering wedge to success in all building and manufacturing lines. Learn Drafting and you'll be "sitting pretty." It's INTERESTING work and Draftsmen are a wonderful bunch of fellows. You're bound to enjoy the good natured atmosphere of a Drafting office and the contact it gives you with important activities and BIG MEN.

Here is a word-for-word copy of the Contract which we have made with 30,000 men in the past three years. I shall be glad to make the same agreement, backed by our entire resources of $2,000,000.00—with YOU.

This agreement proves our training does make *real Draftsmen.* It proves that after you finish, *there are well-paid jobs available.* And you can prepare yourself without losing a day's pay or time, without quitting your job or leaving home!

O. C. MILLER
Director Extension Work

The American School

Chartered 30 years ago as an EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION, and, like the best resident schools and colleges, conducted NOT FOR PROFIT. We offer complete, thorough, up-to-date instruction—prepared by 200 leading Engineers, Executives and Educators. A unique instruction, built to meet the specifications of well-paid jobs as laid down by employers themselves—yet simplified for ready understanding by men with only common schooling.

The American School

Dept. D-64, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago

O. C. MILLER, Director, Extension Work ★
The American School, Dept. D-64
Drexel Ave. & 58th St., Chicago

I am interested to get particulars of your Job and Raise Guarantee. Also send 3 Drafting Lessons without cost or obligation.

Name _____

Address _____

Age _____ Occupation _____

Real Value $1.50

Pocket Ben

THERE'S more good time-keeping service, more real value in Pocket Ben than you'd ever expect in a $1.50 watch.

Pocket Ben is both sturdy and thoroughly reliable, and mighty good looking, too. It's the kind of a time-piece that you can carry with pride and confidence.

Built by the makers of
Big Ben and other Westclox.
Sold everywhere

WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois

New Westclox Auto Clock

Attractive, convenient, reliable. Fits any car. Quickly attached on dash or above wind-shield

$2.50

Make $12.00 A DAY by Showing PIONEER Tailoring

Double Your Income

Even part time men make $5 an hour selling famous PIONEER made to measure all-wool union-made suits at $23.50 and $33.50. Liberal cash commissions paid daily in advance. **Customer satisfaction brings 90% repeat orders.** Generous bonus besides. We train the inexperienced. Greatest values ever offered. Finest outfit ever assembled—extra large cloth samples — furnished FREE reliable men with willingness to work for success. Write TODAY.

Pioneer Tailoring Co.
Congress and Throop
Dept. W1003, Chicago

FRECKLE-FACE

Now is the Time to Get Rid of Those Ugly Spots

Here's a chance, Miss Freckleface, to try a remedy for freckles with the guarantee of a reliable concern that it will not cost you a penny unless it removes your freckles; while if it does give you a clear complexion the expense is trifling.

Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from any drug or department store and a few applications should show you how easy it is to rid yourself of the homely freckles and get a beautiful complexion. Rarely is more than one ounce needed for the worst cases.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as this strength is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove your freckles.

MEN ARE WANTED

In Railway Traffic Inspection
and they get as high as $250 per month salary

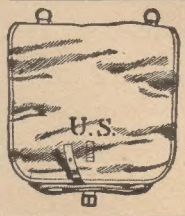
We'll train you—and upon completion of your training—assist you to a position paying at least $120 per month salary plus expenses, or refund your tuition.

It only takes about 3 months of spare time home study and you're ready to step into a profitable position with rapid salary advances to $175 and up. It's healthful outdoor work with regular hours—away from dingy shops and monotonous desks.

Write today for free booklet--
and contract showing how we assist you to a position after graduation or refund your tuition.

STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, Div. 14, Buffalo, New York

EARN UP TO $250 per month SALARY



ARMY HAVERSACK

heavy canvas, with leather sling, with pockets, for campers, farmers, woodsmen.

Price $1.00 POSTPAID

Illustrated catalog, 380 pages, issue 1927, at 50 cents, shows tents, high-powered rifles, helmets, saddles, etc. Special circular for 2c stamp. Established 1865.

Francis Bannerman Sons
501 Broadway New York City

Foreign Work!

Like to Travel—Does Romantic, Wealthy South America call you? Unusual opportunities for young men. American employers. Fare and expenses furnished.

BIG PAY. *Write for Free List.*

SOUTH AMERICAN SERVICE BUREAU
14600 Alma Avenue Detroit, Michigan

Kindly mention Adventure in writing to advertisers or visiting your dealer.

The Day-Dreamer

Will he ever wake up?

HIS life is made up of rosy visions.

He sees himself in a manager's office—as the president of a firm—with a $20,000 salary—perhaps even as a millionaire with a Rolls Royce, a rakish yacht and a swell country estate.

But all this grandeur is in his day dreams. He lives in the golden **PARADISE OF TOMORROW**—and it never comes.

He does nothing with the opportunities that surround him **TODAY.**

He feels above his present job. He is always "going to find a place where his abilities will be appreciated." But he **NEVER DOES.**

He is the despair of his employers, for they know that he **REALLY HAS ABILITY.** He can plan with intelligence, he has original ideas, imagination. If he could only concentrate on today, instead of **TOMORROW,** he might have all the prosperity he craves!

What he needs is a **STICK OF DYNAMITE**—anything to wake him up and teach him to get results from his abilities **NOW.**

If he doesn't give himself a rousing jolt, he will complain more and more of not being "appreciated"—and gradually "peter out" into a failure—**A JOB COWARD**—a cog in a business machine.

He will always be somebody else's servant, instead of master of his own destiny.

How does he get into such a mental state? Because he uses only about **ONE-TENTH** of his mental energies in doing the vital things that count. Psychologists have proved that most of us use **NINE-TENTHS** of our brain power in day-dreaming, fortune-wishing, aimless time-killing. We are nearly all victims of the vicious habit of living far below our God-given endowments!

It doesn't help to learn that certain of your mental abilities have become **WEAK THROUGH DISUSE,** just as unused muscles do. Nobody knows better than you (if you are honest with yourself) that there must be a "screw loose somewhere." The proof of it is that you have failed to reach the high mark you **ONCE** set for yourself.

You admit it. What you want to know is, **WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?**

There is one very simple thing that you **CAN** do—**now.** You can find out what Pelmanism has done for 550,000 men and women, some of whom were facing **THE VERY SAME DISSATISFACTION** with their attainments that you are feeling. Pelmanism developed the mental powers they lacked—it replaced procrastination with "do it now" efficiency; it put concentration in the place of mind-wandering; it substituted self-confidence for self-distrust. You will learn how Pelmanism has often awakened abilities which the individuals did not **DREAM** they possessed!

Since Pelmanism is the science of applied psychology, it brings **SELF-REALIZATION** to all classes and conditions of men and women—prominent and famous as well as obscure and unknown. And among the better known persons who use and advocate it are:

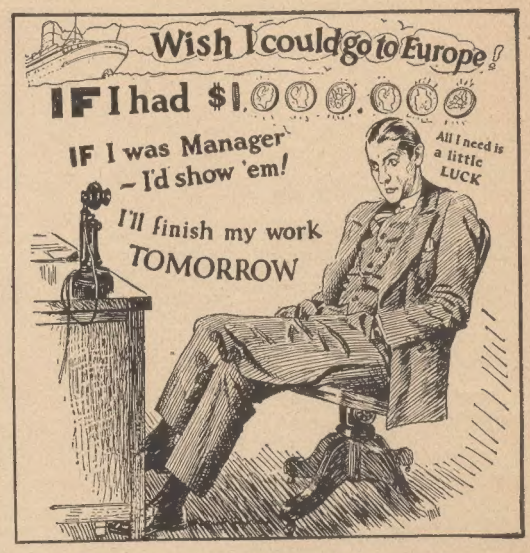
T. P. O'Connor, "The Father of the House of Commons"

General Sir Robert Baden Powell, Founder of the Boy Scout Movement

Judge Ben B. Lindsey, Founder of the Juvenile Court, Denver

Frank P. Walsh, Former Chairman of the National War Labor Board

Jerome K. Jerome, Novelist



General Sir Frederick Maurice, Director of Military Operations, Imperial General Staff

Admiral Lord Beresford, G.C.B., G.C.V.O.

Sir Harry Lauder, Comedian

W. L. George, Author

Baroness Orczy, Author

Prince Charles of Sweden

—and hundreds of others of equal prominence.

A remarkable book called "Scientific Mind-Training" has been written about Pelmanism. **IT CAN BE OBTAINED FREE.** Yet thousands of people who read this announcement and who **NEED** this book will not send for it. "It's no use," they will say. "It will do me no good," they will tell themselves. "It's all tommyrot," others will say.

But if they will use their **HEADS,** they will realize that people cannot be **HELPED** by tommyrot and that there **MUST** be something in Pelmanism, when it has such a record with 650,000 different individuals, and when it is endorsed by the kind of people listed above.

If you are made of the stuff that isn't content to keep on "putting off" all the good things of life—if you have a spark of **INDEPENDENCE** left in your soul, write for this free book. It tells you what Pelmanism is, **WHAT IT HAS DONE FOR OTHERS,** and what it can do for you.

The first principle of **YOUR** success is to do something radical in your life. You cannot make just an ordinary move, for you will soon again sink into the mire of discouragement. Let Pelmanism help you **FIND YOURSELF.** Don't put it off. Mail the coupon below now—now, while your resolve to **DO SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF** is strong.

THE PELMAN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA
71 West 45th Street, Dept. 1599, New York City

Offices in London, Paris, Stockholm, Delhi, Durban and Melbourne

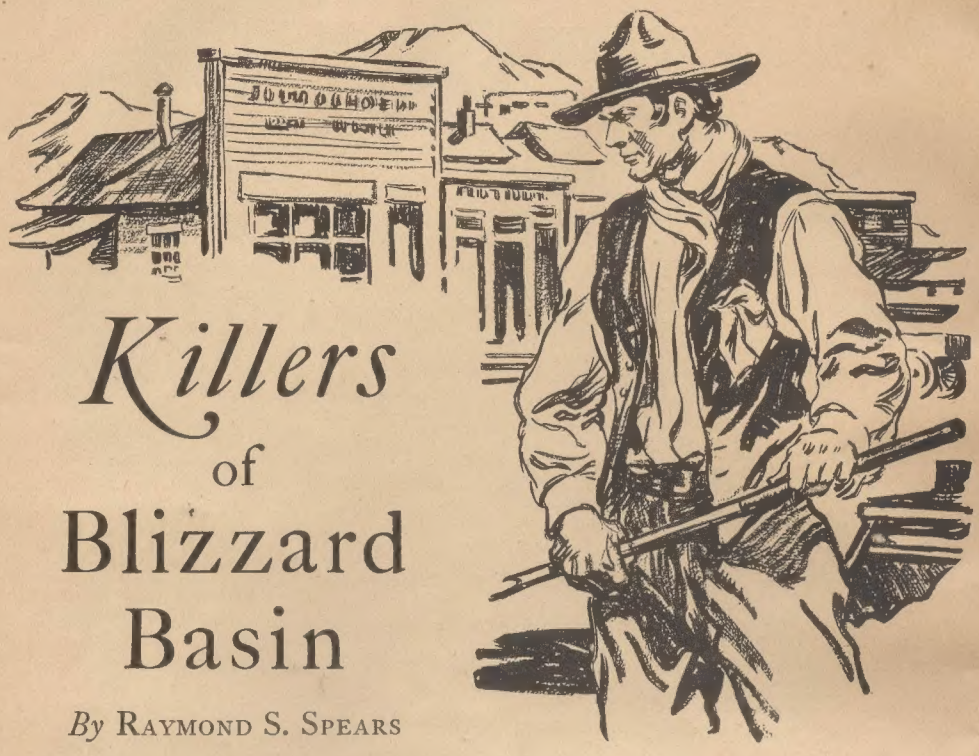
The Pelman Institute of America
71 West 45th Street, Dept. 1599
New York City

I want you to show me what Pelmanism has actually done for over 650,000 people. Please send me your free book, "Scientific Mind Training." This places me under no obligation whatever.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....



Killers of Blizzard Basin

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

"WHAT'S that?" Rudabon exclaimed.

"Rewards on those birds? Then I——"

"You're lucky we don't pin a murder charge on you," Coroner Swanson turned to him, sharply. "You've killed four men, now. The Government is not in the habit of paying men for habitual homicide."

* *

This is just one exciting suggestion from this fast moving novelette of the West. You will find it complete in EVERYBODY'S for September.

And in the same issue: Captain Dingle begins an intensely interesting novel of the sea; R. W. Alexander writes of the quest for gold which took men far up a river in the jungles of South America; and there are dramatic short stories by Frederick Niven, Millard Ward, Henry LaCossitt, Elwood F. Pierce and many others.

Everybody's

September issue on sale August 20th at all newsstands—25c.

$1000.00 in Story Sales

"My sales will reach $1000 by the end of the year... I owe my success to your interesting and efficient system of training," writes a successful Palmer student, Pearl F. Botsford, Dayton, Ohio.

This is but one instance of the success enjoyed by Palmer students. If you have the ability, the urge to write, personalized Palmer training, the sympathetic criticism of experienced writers will help you to produce stories that sell.

Gertrude Atherton

Gertrude Atherton, author of "The Immortal Marriage," "Black Oxen" and other successful novels, says of the Palmer Short Story Course: "The subject is about as fully covered as is within mortal achievement." Use coupon.

PALMER INSTITUTE OF AUTHORSHIP
Dept. 127-J, Palmer Building, Hollywood, Calif.

I am interested in

☐ Short Story Writing ☐ English and Self-Expression
☐ Photoplay Writing

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

All correspondence strictly confidential
No salesman will call on you

PAYS BIG

Show Gibson tailoring and make $100.00 a week and more. Real style, finest made-to-measure tailoring, all-wool fabrics. Remarkable values at $23.50 and $31.50. Sales come wonderfully easy and quick, even if you have no previous experience. **Your customer's satisfaction is always sure and repeat orders come fast for you.** Liberal commissions paid in advance. We handle deliveries, collections and give active co-operation in helping you build a big paying business. High grade sample outfit, with over 100 large wool samples, style book, supplies, etc., furnished you FREE. Don't delay—write for this handsome outfit that will put you into business for yourself.

SHOW $23.50 Tailoring

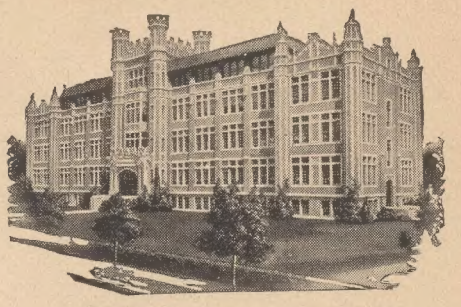
W. Z. GIBSON, Inc.
500 Throop St.
Dept. V-403 Chicago

The BLACKSTONE

South Michigan Avenue
and the Lake Front
CHICAGO

Rates as low as five dollars single and six dollars double, with bath. Unexcelled food and world-renowned service which has been accepted as the standard of hotel perfection.

The Drake Hotel Company, owners, also operate The Drake, Lake Shore Drive and Michigan Avenue, Chicago.



Go to High School at Home

You can secure a high school education right at home by studying the splendid new courses recently prepared by the International Correspondence Schools.

These courses are equivalent to the courses given in resident high schools. They have been specially arranged for men and women who wish to meet college entrance examinations, to qualify for a business position, or to make up the education they missed when forced to leave school too soon.

The College Preparatory Course, the High School Commercial Course and the High School English Course include English, algebra, ancient, medieval, modern and U. S. History, physiology, literature, geography, Latin, bookkeeping, drawing, geometry, shorthand, physics, chemistry, salesmanship, advertising, civics, trigonometry, economics, American business law, corporation finance, money and banking, business and trade economics, etc. A diploma is given at graduation.

The lessons are easy to understand and you will make rapid progress because you will be *in a class by yourself* and you will study under the guidance of instructors who are sincerely interested in helping you to get ahead and achieve the bigger things of life.

Just mark and mail the coupon and we will gladly send you interesting free booklets describing the High School Courses of the International Correspondence Schools or any other subject in which you are interested.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2007-F, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

☐ College Preparatory Course
☐ High School Commercial Course
☐ High School English Course
☐ High School Vocational Course
☐ High School Agricultural Course

☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Business Law
☐ Banking and Banking Law
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Private Secretary
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Better Letters
☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ English
☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Mechanical Engineer
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Civil Engineer
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Metallurgy
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Architect
☐ Architects' Blueprints
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Automobile Work
☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Navigation
☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Mathematics

Name.....

Street
Address.....

City..... State.....

And so to bed!

Up, at the end of day, to the brimming white tub and the bobbing welcome of Ivory!

This is sweet content . . . to slip into soft warmth that comes like a blanket up to the chin. How easy to spin the golden moments while Ivory drifts near your lazy hand! Slowly and luxuriantly you cover yourself with crests of Ivory foam. Then, down in the water again to let the cleansing bubbles rinse quickly away!

Have you ever wondered why an Ivory bath never gives your body a parched, taut feeling? Then remember that it meets the severest test of soap; Ivory is so pure that it can even protect babies' delicate skin.

And so from an Ivory bath, you slip drowsily between friendly sheets. Already you are ebbing away on the sweet tide of sleep. To you, a very good night!

PROCTER & GAMBLE

kind to everything it touches · 99 $^{44}/_{100}$ % Pure · "It floats"

Kindly mention Adventure in writing to advertisers or visiting your dealer.

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

CONTENTS

1928
Vol. LXVII No. 6

for September 1st

Anthony M. Rud
EDITOR

Sons of the Sword . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 2
A Novel of the French Foreign Legion

The Eurasian. . . . . HARRY A. FRANCK 56
India Types (III)

Brood of the Eagle . . . . . CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON 58
A Story of the Redwood Forests

The Appearance of Evil . . . . . F. R. BUCKLEY 70

The Jocular Pilgrim. . . . . BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR 71
A Story of a Joke Loving Bronco Buster

The Roaring Horn . . . . . GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND 81
Conclusion of a Stirring Novel of Hurricane Seas

The Halls of Learning. . . . . GUTHRIE BROWN 106
A Story of the Road Builders

Neptune Speaks. . . . . FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE 115
A Grim Little Episode of the Sea

Joyful and Triumphant . . . . . ROBERT CARSE 118
A Story of the Montana Ranges

Ballad of San Francisco . . . . . JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE 130

Man Size. . . . . FOSTER-HARRIS 133
A Story of the Texas Oil Fields

The Exodus of Toby . . . . . HUGH PENDEXTER 146
A Novelette of the California Gold Rush

The Camp-Fire 182 Ask Adventure 187 Trail Ahead 192

Cover Design by Hubert Rogers *Headings by Neil O'Keeffe*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; Levin Rank, Secretary and Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered: Copyright, 1928, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

SONS *of the* SWORD

By GEORGES SURDEZ

CHAPTER I

LOUIS CHALABRE

THE MOKHAZENIS formed ranks in the spacious yard of the infantry barracks at Hassi-Mazzer. They were irregular cavalrymen, recruited by France among the friendly tribes, a sort of militia. Good looking men, hawk faced, thin lipped, perched in high saddles on stocky little native mounts. Save that they exhibited more fantasy in their garb and wore pale blue or pearl gray *burnous*, instead of the scarlet cloaks of the Spahis, there was little to distinguish them from organized troops. Each man held, butt resting on the right thigh, a Lebel carbine.

The southern face of the esplanade was closed by a loopholed wall. On the other three faces rose the high barracks, crested with brilliant tiles glittering against the darkening, greenish sky. In the open windows, watching with casual curiosity, were grouped Legionaires, privates of the Tirailleurs and the Disciplinary section.

Lieutenant Chalabre stood before the irregulars, his wiry body tall and trim in the khaki uniform, the red band of his *képi* twice looped with gold, startling as a poppy. Beneath the leather vizor, his glance shone straight, steely.

A Complete Novel of the French Colonial Troops in the North African Deserts

"*Ya—ouled!*" he called out in Arabic. "Oh—lads! We must ride far, we must ride fast. Then, *baroud*—battle. I have told what each man must bring. If anything is missing after the start you will be held to account. If there be riders among you whose horses are not good let them speak to the sergeants. We leave in an hour."

He waved his hand in conclusion. French non-commissioned officers passed among the riders to inspect the equipment.

Warning had reached Hassi-Mazzer that afternoon of a band of Berber raiders operating fifty leagues southward in the Sahara. There were no camel mounted troops within the walls at the time, hence the Mokhazenis had been called upon, placed under Chalabre.

Louis Chalabre, by training and inheritance, was the ideal man to lead them. Both his father and grandfather had been cavalry officers, had spent their careers in North Africa. He himself was born in the Oranese hinterland, had learned the dialects when young. Graduating from St. Cyr, the Military Academy, he had asked to serve in his native land.

Above medium height, broad shouldered, deep chested, he was lean of hips and legs. The daintiness of the ankles and feet in the boots of soft red leather contrasted with the strength of wrists and

hands. He carried his head high. His face was tanned and seamed about the light blue eyes by exposure to the sun's glare.

Independent command was an opportunity long awaited. A victory over the Berbers would hasten his transfer to the Meharistes, a change which he had applied for months before, the goal of his ambition. Dangers were great in the camel corps, but chances for advancement were also increased.

"EH, THERE, Chalabre!"

"Hello, Fangeas—" Chalabre turned to face an officer of his own rank, a stout, red faced little chap, the colonel's secretary.

"Say, the Old Man wants to see you immediately. Hope there's no counter order."

Chalabre laughed easily.

"Short of letting those fellows raise hell down there undisturbed, some one has to go."

He left the barracks and walked toward a rambling structure, a mongrel pile of masonry, cross between Arabic architecture and French *sous-préfecture.* On a slanting staff hung a small tricolor.

Chalabre passed through the lower halls, ascended a narrow, steep stairway, and reached the upper veranda. From there he could see the oblong, matchbox buildings of the railroad, flanking the twin ribbons of steel that ended here after slicing across the hilly waste from Ain-Saffra, parallel with the Moroccan border. Beyond were the barracks, and still farther the tawny, loopholed walls of the native town, a jagged, darker bar against the dusk terraced houses in which lived six thousand persons crowded in filth and heat.

For long hours that day the wind had blown from the south, bringing, in quivering mist of impalpable sand dust, the furnace breath of the desert. With the approach of night had come relief, not yet the cool breath from the west—merely a lingering, teasing stir of air. Chalabre smiled as he walked on, realizing that soon he would be in the open, away from the sound and smell of humanity.

He lifted heavy curtains screening a wide, arched doorway. His boots sank into thick carpets. On the walls of the long room a collection of weapons glowed feebly. A portrait of the President of the Republic, scarlet ribbon slashing across snowy shirt, smiled down with bearded benevolence. A great map of the local sector was pinned against a partition.

Colonel de Castex, commander in chief of the forces of France in the Occidental Sahara, straightened in his chair. Keen brown eyes gleamed beneath a sweep of wrinkled forehead. A graying mustache lifted in a grimace of welcome.

Chalabre saluted.

"I'm going to disappoint you, son," de Castex said abruptly after shaking hands, "but you're going to accept what falls on your head with good grace, do you hear?"

"Yes, Colonel," Chalabre agreed. His heart sank.

"You've heard of Captain de Bremond?"

"I have, Colonel."

"He is arriving tomorrow morning. He will take command of the expedition. I have received suggestions that I can not disregard to throw opportunity his way. I know you're sore, but watch yourself and it may prove a lucky chance for you."

"Yes, Colonel," Chalabre assented. His voice resounded hoarsely, yet he managed to smile.

"De Bremond was in the Legion before; therefore the troops employed will be a section of the mounted company." De Castex held up his hand warningly. "I know your objections. Not mobile enough, needs more supplies, will suffer where natives would be comfortable. But that's what's going to happen. The Mokhazenis will be cut down to ten, to serve as scouts for the Legionaires. By the way, forget all you've read about de Bremond. No one is ever quite as good or bad as he is pictured in the dailies. I called you in to inform you

first. Here's the official telegram, arrived an hour ago."

Chalabre nodded, rose mechanically, arranged the folds of his tunic with unsteady fingers. It had been decent of the old man to speak to him first rather than have him learn through gossip.

"Good night, Colonel."

"Good night, young man. Don't grieve. You have years ahead for independent command."

CHALABRE went to the barrack yard and gave the necessary instructions, then to his room to change into whites before dinner. His orderly, a quiet, deft native lad, lighted the acetylene lamp, folded the khaki uniform carefully. laid out the whites. He left, his soft soled slippers noiseless. In spite of de Castex's warning, Chalabre, while he dressed, recalled what he had read of de Bremond.

Roland de Bremond was a nobleman, bore several titles, chief of which was marquis. He must be, Chalabre reasoned, thirty-four years old. Ten years ago he had had his hour of fame. Sub-lieutenant in the Legion, stationed in the Upper Tonkin, he had extricated a column from ambush, revealing rare initiative and superb courage. Papers had published his photograph, run stories of his achievement. He had returned a national hero.

Before long, a kind government, wishing always to place the right man in the wrong place, had given him a post in the diplomatic service. Military attache in several embassies, titled, wealthy in his own right, de Bremond had married a Greek lady of almost royal birth. Eventually he had obtained unlimited leave from the army to enter politics. Himself a legitimist, a royalist, no one could ask him by what right he spoke. He bore the scars of Chinese steel on his body. His articles received attention but were not always relished by his adversaries.

De Bremond was thin skinned. He challenged one of his foes, editor of a socialist paper. The editor laughed, pointed out that he had seldom held a sword and, exempted from military service for weak constitution, he had never fired a gun. He refused to name a proxy to meet de Bremond and suggested that the nobleman meet him on his own field—writing. To prove his point, he printed in his paper the letter written by de Bremond with the faults of style underlined.

De Bremond endured the laughter and ridicule for weeks, then he went into his enemy's office, cane in hand. A group of ink smudged gentlemen appeared and threw him out. The fickle public derided him, forgetting that they had applauded him in the past. Editorials declared that if Monsieur de Bremond wished to fight, he should avail himself of his rank in the army and encounter men worthy of his steel. By what right did de Bremond hope to live on the glory of a single deed? The safety of free speech, wrote *Le Clairon*, lay in sending the ardent polemist to some place where of late blows were exchanged freely—the Oranese-South for instance.

In the messroom Chalabre picked up the latest papers.

In the pages of *Le Soir*, he found what he sought.

> A certain daring gentleman has decided to seek new laurels in a less pacific setting. We have it on good authority from the Ministry that he will leave within the month for the Algerian South, where tribesmen have been objecting—with the lack of consideration for our good wishes so common among native populations—to our benevolent rule. We hope, for the sake of his pretty wife, that he returns whole and happy. The contrary is little to be feared. Kind authorities will see that he achieves distinction safely.

Chalabre grinned.

"That paper is mistaken; it isn't a safe pastime to go south just now."

WHEN Chalabre sat down at the table one of the officers called out mockingly—

"Cat's paw!"

Evidently the news had spread. Fangeas, privileged to know more than others, read off the orders.

"You're going along, Clarey," he concluded.

Lieutenant Clarey, of the Legion's mounted company, a tall thin man of thirty-five, looked up. His steady gaze swept the table briefly, almost defiantly.

"I am honored by it." He dropped the words quietly. "I knew Captain de Bremond years ago in Indo-China. I was a corporal at the time. We had gone out to clean up a nest of Black Flags. Ambushed, half of us in the river, the rest wallowing in a marsh, the brown bellies so near they crawled out and sliced the heads of the fallen. The captain was wounded, the lieutenant didn't know what to do. De Bremond, little more than a kid then, took charge and no one thought to object. Instead of hesitating he made us all cross the river, regardless of losses, and reform on firm ground. Then he swam back, gained the nearest optical telegraph and asked for help. With three bullets in his hide and the forest lousy with pirates."

"They say he isn't the same man," Fangeas objected.

"They say—who says?" Clarey shrugged. "If a man has guts he always has."

The conversation shifted. Clarey was presumed to hold a grudge longer than was reasonable. As for Chalabre, what he had heard consoled him. He was the rare type who considers his country sound, the graft and petty jealousies of those in power merely the scummy froth on a clear stream. His rancor completely vanished the next morning when he met de Bremond.

CAPTAIN DE BREMOND was reedy, almost girlish in physique. But there was a hard set to his lips, a decisive clipping of his words. His gestures were precise, controlled. The gray eyes, warm and steady, and the simplicity of his greeting, won Chalabre.

"I understand that you expect to go alone, Lieutenant," he said, "I must be a nuisance. I beg your pardon for it, but I had to leap at a chance to break back into my old profession."

"That's all right," Chalabre answered, "as they say out here, *insha Allah*, Captain." He beckoned to Clarey. "Lieutenant Clarey, Captain."

"I remember you," de Bremond said vaguely.

Clarey recalled himself to his chief.

"Listed for the military medal, weren't you?" The captain's eyes swept the other officer's coat, bare of all decorations save campaign medals.

"I got drunk before it was granted," Clarey explained, flushing.

"Oh—" de Bremond paused. "Too bad, old man. Yet, you became a lieutenant later, so what's the harm?" He grinned, his surface reserve melting. "Hope it was a good drunk!"

"It was, Captain."

"Have you maps handy?" de Bremond asked of Chalabre.

They were in the lower room of the Residence. An orderly was sent upstairs to ask Fangeas for the maps. When he returned de Bremond spread them flat on the table. Chalabre pointed out the route to be followed.

"Where do these chaps come from, Chalabre?"

"Midway between Tafilalet and the Draa, Captain." Chalabre indicated the emplacements which embraced the entire border of Morocco. "Reports claim thirty or forty. But there may be more than that if we sight them at all. They gather quickly at a given place when we approach. Splendid fighters. One must proceed with caution against them."

De Bremond looked up, pencil poised.

"I daresay. I've read all the reports, Lieutenant Chalabre. Clarey, go and see that everything is ready, will you."

Clarey saluted and left. Chalabre hesitated, expecting to be called upon for advice and information. De Bremond was a novice in the region.

"Captain, in regard to supplies—" he began.

"Thank you," de Bremond replied, with placid courtesy. "That is in the hands of Lieutenant Clarey. Have your men ready to start in two hours."

BEFORE leaving Hassi-Mazzer, Chalabre was called to de Castex's office for a last conference.

"I have hinted to de Bremond that he should ask your advice. He said nothing against it, but didn't seem to like the idea. Handle him diplomatically. Speak to him if he blunders too badly. He's been out of the harness so long, I fear he's rusty."

"I'll do my best, Colonel."

"Yours is a hard task, Chalabre. I suppose that he and Clarey are already as close as the fingers of one hand. Be patient, son. For the love of God, let there be no trouble between you."

"No trouble shall come from me, Colonel."

"I know. Your father was a friend of mine. I've seen you grow up. Word of honor, you give me the truth of the affair when you return, and what's to be credited to you will be. Not officially, perhaps, but down here among men whose opinion counts."

"Thank you, Colonel."

"All right. Smooth things, and try to avoid massacre. For the rest, remember—"

"That Captain de Bremond is my commander."

"Exactly. Good luck."

Understanding man, de Castex, Chalabre thought. He had reason to be. Time and again when he had organized a column, gathered information, assembled troops and material for a genuine effort, a general from the north arrived, followed his plans and reaped the credit. Too much a man of action to be popular with the Ministry, too little inclined to gloss things over and send in glowing reports, he was still a colonel when salon butterflies were sporting stars on their sleeves and gold leaf on their *képis*.

BY THE time the walls of Hassi-Mazzer had vanished in the glare, Chalabre knew that the trip would not be a pleasant one. De Bremond was a man on the defensive. He doubtlessly realized it was obvious to others that he was the object of special favor. Only a section of the mounted company was being used and according to regulation there was place but for one officer. Chalabre and his ten men had been adjoined to the expedition to make it appear more important, to justify the presence of the three striper.

In addition to the three officers there were two sergeants, four corporals, a bugler and fifty-six men. As is the rule in the mounted sections one mule served for two men—on this occasion two additional mules for the officers' baggage. The mules were laden with food and ammunition and carried a rider at all times. This type of outfit, capable of great bursts of speed over a period of hours, was not as efficient for the pursuit of raiders as the Mokhazenis.

The section marched across the plain in formation by fours. The men afoot were in the lead, those mounted following a few yards behind. The reverse would have forced the footmen to inhale the dust. At the end of each hour a whistle blew and, when the unit moved on after a rest of five minutes, those who had walked rode. The men carried their rifles across the back instead of suspended from the right shoulder. They were hardened men, selected from their regiment for proved endurance and marksmanship.

At first glance they looked alike in their khaki garments and cross belts. Yet there were fifteen nations among them. Big limbed Germans, or men of German extraction, Swiss, Luxemburgers, Austrians, the usual sprinkling of Alsatians loyal to France, eager to follow her flag; a Turk, two Salonika Greeks. Another gigantic fellow was rumored to be a Circassian. Among themselves they spoke a language based on French, studied with alien locution, with Arabic words and phrases. They had heard of de Bremond —from veterans who spun their yarns in torrid barrack rooms or on the decks of transports steaming to the four corners of the Colonies.

The captain, after perceptible self-

consciousness at the start, fell in with their speech, talked to them as they wished to be spoken to. Unfortunates who had made a failure of everything save soldiering, they were easily flattered, willing to die for words of praise.

"Is he really glad to be back?" Chalabre wondered.

He could not tell. De Bremond talked little of himself. After the soft life in France this first hike tired him. His cheeks were sunken, the hollows beneath his eyes caked with grimy sand dust. Twice Chalabre saw him refrain from a gesture toward his canteen, and admired him for his courage. One man drinking will start a score. Evidentally de Bremond feared to be tempted, and at the next hourly halt left his canteen on the pack mule.

He rode with Clarey at the head of the procession. Chalabre dropped to the rear with his native riders. The Mokhazenis were disgruntled. From what Chalabre overheard they had lost hope of loot. There were too many Europeans in the detachment. And they did not believe they would sight their foes.

"Too slow—too slow," they repeated. "The others will have departed. Why were we not allowed to go yesterday, we who could ride so swiftly?"

The Legionaires were singing, a song relative to the moral character of regimental *adjudants*. The hammering of heavy soles pulsed in time like a savage tomtom. The obscene words of the famous chant strung out defiantly, shredded into the glare. Monotonous, unending in its low swells, the pebbly plain spread before them, rimmed by the blazing sky.

The night halt was called near a water hole.

FATIGUE parties left to gather firewood and fill the buckets. Other men staked the sectors, the long chains used to fasten the mules. Chalabre shook out his sheepskin sleeping bag in the center of his men's camp. The strong smell of baking *kesra*, a sort of campaign bread manufactured each night, lifted. Clarey posted sentries, one on each side of the square formed by the outfit, which had the mule lines for a center.

De Bremond paced to and fro stiffly, shaking his legs. He was tired, nervous. Chalabre thought that if he wore himself out thus on the first day he would have little genuine energy left. He strolled toward Clarey.

"Don't you think we better double the sentries?" he asked.

Clarey looked up at him, surprised. Then he smiled.

"I know that's customary, old man. But I talked it over with the captain and he says there's no need tiring out more than one man at a time. We're too far north for an attack."

"Hell!" Chalabre said feelingly. "Three months ago a patrol was cut to pieces fifteen miles south of Hassi-Mazzer. You'll have a hundred odd fiends in your lap in the middle of the night if you don't watch out."

Clarey shrugged and walked away, whistling under his breath. Chalabre flushed. There appeared to be a deliberate attempt to leave him out of things. He said no more; and joined the other two at dinner. De Bremond, unwilling to admit he was more tired than his colleagues, sat up with them, told stories, of Constantinople, Athens, Belgrade—their societies, their scandal.

"Last cigaret before turning in," he finished, and then turned to Chalabre. "Have you any suggestions to offer for tomorrow, Lieutenant?" There was more than a hint of mockery in his tone.

"I have for tonight, Captain," Chalabre said quietly. "It is regular to double the sentries in the mounted companies to avoid theft of animals and guns."

"An excess of caution when we are pursuing men who dare not face us," De Bremond scoffed. "I know by heart all that you are going to evoke—the stealthy native creeping in the darkness, the stifled cry of the falling sentry. God! I've been in Indo-China and fretted myself sick for weeks until I realized what

was real and what was not. Anything else, Chalabre?"

"Yes, Captain—" Chalabre flushed, kept a smile on his lips. "You ordered me today to keep my riders bunched in the rear. I think it would be best to throw them out in a sort of oval, each man a half mile from the main body, as a feeler. We have no guarantee that the Berbers will not do a bit of hunting on their own account."

"Tomorrow you will form the rear guard as usual," de Bremond stated deliberately.

"I might as well have been left behind at Hassi-Mazzer in that case," Chalabre pointed out.

"Isn't it customary to have a rear guard, Lieutenant?"

"Which is the rear?" Chalabre asked.

"What do you mean?" De Bremond lifted his eyebrows inquiringly. "Our rear is the north, toward Hassi-Mazzer."

"Old equations don't hold true out here," Chalabre explained. "There is no rear, no front and no flanks that can be distinguished. Here an attack is as likely to be launched upon as from all sides, so that all sides must be equally well guarded. The moment we are out of sight of walls defended by our rifles we are plunged into danger. Have you studied the sketches of the combats in this region, Captain?"

"A bit, yes—"

"Geographically, our foes inhabit the west, yet they come upon us from all directions. The skirmish at Asfa was fought by the French with their face toward the north. The mistake here is to apply old rules."

"You may be right," de Bremond admitted. "Nevertheless, let me explain. You form my cavalry. I wish to keep you grouped close to me, to be able to send you in if needed in a body."

"They'll leave us no chance to charge in a compact mass—and rushing a line of expert shots on horseback, with only ten men, is folly."

"And if it please me to be foolish?" de Bremond asked with a short laugh.

"In that case, I can do nothing save obey," Chalabre assented amiably. "The responsibility is yours."

"That's it, exactly!" de Bremond exclaimed. "Therefore, I shall use my judgment. You officers who specialize in this warfare and that have a multitude of theories. I don't blame you. That's your reason for existence. But you must have noticed that old fashioned ways generally succeed."

"Organized troops, superior armament, European prestige sometimes counterbalance rashness," Chalabre observed. "But things are changing. At each defeat, the natives learn something. They have already modified their attacks to use their numerical superiority against us. If you believe that their attack will be a rush, without thought of cover, you're four years behind the times, Captain."

"All right, let's admit all that." De Bremond smiled quietly. "Nevertheless, I'm handling things myself. You doubtless feared you would do all the work and I would receive the credit."

"Personal motives have no place here," Chalabre retorted.

"Are you sure?"

"As far as I am concerned, I'm sure—Captain."

De Bremond stood up.

"Forgive us a moment, Clarey. Lieutenant, come this way."

CHALABRE followed his chief away from the central fire around which the three had been seated. He was not a little puzzled by de Bremond's strange behavior. He received the explanation he had been expecting.

"You've heard why I'm here. There's no use going into details. I'm being watched, and not altogether with sympathy. You're a nice lad, Chalabre, and I have the greatest liking for you personally. Yet, you represent to me supervision, a check on my activities. I have the sensation that you are eternally judging me, waiting for my faults. What you say is full of sense, I know it. Clarey knows it. But I had hoped to be alone—

you understand? Now you offer suggestions. The expedition is a success. Who did it all? Experienced cavalryman, the specialist. Understand?"

Chalabre nodded.

"I'm beginning to see, yes."

"With you present, anything that may happen will be counted as your work. People will say, 'De Bremond—lucky for him he had young Chalabre, who pulled the chestnuts out of the fire!' Isn't that what will be said? Speak frankly."

"Something of the sort," Chalabre agreed.

"Lord, Chalabre, you can't understand what I've been through. See here, old man, de Castex told me he had maintained you in the expedition only because it had been assigned to you in the first place. Your future doesn't hang on it. Your reputation is solidly established; you're due for transfer to the Meharistes. Can't you let me work it out alone?"

"I'm willing to obey," Chalabre repeated.

"As matters stand, we are bound to clash constantly. I admit I wanted to get you out of the way, sought to bring on an open quarrel and send you off. There would have been witnesses. Instead, here is what I suggest. Tomorrow, you remain here with your natives and wait for a couple of days. I promise to double sentry, to proceed as you suggested, but only by myself. You're not a man who will listen to threats, Chalabre, but I know you're the sort who will do another man a favor—"

"With all respect due you," Chalabre murmured, "you're a fool."

"A fool? The next four or five days mean for me the difference between obscurity and a great future. Those who urged me to come back said that after I 'had grown a new skin', wiped out that ridiculous affair in a little blood, I would be pushed ahead. You're the grain of sand, forgive me for saying it, that may sway the scales one way or the other."

Chalabre knew that if he threw himself headlong against the combination formed by Clarey and the captain he would end up smashed from rank and prestige.

Any sort of quarrel before the privates and non-coms would be sufficient. It was better for the section to proceed with one head than with a divided staff. The will of the leader would prevail in any case. Later, de Bremond must explain why he left Chalabre behind. But he seemed ready to face the adverse judgment of those in the Sahara to gain the plaudits of the Paris crowds.

"What do you decide?" de Bremond urged.

"I can only do as you suggest, Captain."

De Bremond pressed the lieutenant's hand warmly.

"You're a good fellow, Chalabre. Will you grant me a couple of your men for guides? Help me trace my course from here by the shortest set of stops?"

"Naturally, Captain."

"Forget that title," de Bremond laughed happily. "I'll be at the top again, don't worry, and if there's anything in pull I'll show you I'm not an ingrate. Clarey! Come over here! He'll do it without a fuss, Clarey, he'll do it!"

Clarey wiped his moist forehead, glistening with sweat in the ruddy glow of the fire.

"I prayed he would, Captain. It was hard to see him pestered so." Clarey offered his hand to Chalabre. "Old man, no grudge? I couldn't go against a man who had been my first officer, could I? And it does him more good than it can possibly do you harm."

Chalabre shrugged. He was sick at heart. What was it de Castex had advised? Diplomacy? Well, this might be considered diplomatic.

"All right, it's settled. As long as I don't need as much rest as you two I'll take the night watch."

"All night?" de Bremond asked.

"All night. I'll have plenty to think about."

WATCHING alone in the night, while the other white men were asleep, a premonition of evil rose within him, a superstitious belief that an expedition badly started would end in disaster.

Despite proved personal courage, de Bremond could be cast out as a Saharan leader. He was worse than no use, positively a force for evil. It took at least two years to instill in an officer the instinctive reactions to desert fighting, to temper his soul. Even men with long experience sometimes ended miserably. Flatters, for instance, who had led his mission to massacre.

Clarey? A dependable subordinate without initiative. By himself, he knew only one set of tactics, one strategy: Rush over the ground, bayonets forward and smash into his foe. The noncoms were splendid men of their type but without intimate knowledge of conditions in the region beyond a few soldierly tricks and devices making for greater personal comfort.

The fighting ability of the outfit might pull it through. Although Legionaires are not the demigods that legend has made of them, they are soldiers of long standing fully grounded in the elements of their trade. Europeans were not the best troops for the desert. Arab and Berber might lack their steadiness in action but the drying of a single water hole along the line of march would not precipitate their collapse.

De Bremond had taken colonial ways into French life and got himself into trouble. Now he had brought petty bickerings and civilian considerations into the desert.

Nothing good could result of it. The two lives did not mix.

WHEN the cloud of dust hanging over the marching detachment had disappeared beyond the horizon line, Chalabre turned back toward the encampment, joined the eight Arabs who had erected temporary canvas shelters.

Pipes had been brought out, filled with *kif* or tobacco according to taste. They were of the same branch of the same tribe, the Ouled bu Hanken. By blood they were related to the Ouled Sidi sheiks of the north and to local Chamba gatherings. Each one had at some time fought against the French. El Bokhari had known Chalabre's father and liked to dwell on this memory within the hearing of the lieutenant.

"A tall man, very strong. He spoke our tongue well. None rode a horse as well as he; no one ever shot straighter. He bore himself with dignity and was indeed a good man. This, his son, is a mere cub to the sire."

The veteran sighed.

"*Ya, ouled!* I was a small lad then and had not wed my first woman nor slain my first man. What warriors lived in those days!"

"May the Mighty empty thy saddle!" a young fellow exclaimed. "Did they know rifles that shot eight and more cartridges without reloading!"

"Hairless chin, empty head," the older man scoffed. He shook the folds of his gorgeous lemon hued *burnous*, picked up a coal from the fire to light his pipe. "What sayest thou, Lieutenant, were men not braver in thy father's time than in ours?"

Chalabre slid between the two men, ate a few dried dates as a token of friendship.

"The Mighty alone knows the truth of that, El Bokhari," he said. "Men of today are like those of yesterday, born of women. Even as always before, and it will be so until the end, some are gifted with courage, some not."

"Allah knows!" El Bokhari granted. "Sayest thou, now thou art seated among us, who are thy friends, why is it that the other chief, the one who seems so like a girl, has not judged best to take us farther? Does he believe we would leave nothing for his soldiers to do?"

"It may be thus explained," Chalabre agreed. "We are horsemen. We can travel faster than the others. Hence we will start in two days. Should the

Berbers feel secure after their passage, we who will come later shall spy them and dispatch warning to the riflemen who will return."

"Child's talk," El Bokhari said placidly. "Roumi reasoning. *Ya!* We have food and drink and it does not matter whether we be here or elsewhere. Yet, remember my words, the little captain does not behave as he should. There are those among the Berbers who were grown fighting men when he was suckling."

"Thy words were mine," Chalabre admitted.

"He closed his ears to thy speech?" The Arab touched the Frenchmen's breast lightly with his fingers. "Does he not know that the heart within and the head above are half ours? We know."

Presently a story teller launched on a lengthy yarn.

"There was once a Kaid of the Ouled Nails who owned a beautiful black stallion . . . "

The flow of Arabic formed but a background to Chalabre's thoughts.

"Her breast was as white as the snows of the Atlas and her teeth were gleaming as the inside of a sea shell. The Kaid, thinking he beheld one of the virgins meant for the blessed Paradise . . ."

Chalabre shook himself awake. The sleepless hours of the night were telling. He managed to linger until the tale was ended, then withdrew quietly and laid down in the shade of the canvas shelter.

A hand on his shoulder awoke him.

A GLANCE at the sun showed that six hours and more had passed.

A strange nervousness prevaded the camp. Even the horses, picketed not far off, were restless. The men had risen and were staring toward the south, save one, who crouched on the ground, his ear pressed against the taut skin of a *daburka* —a little drum.

"What is going on?" Chalabre asked.

"*Baroud, baroud!* It was not until a moment ago that we could be sure though we have been listening for long. Powder is being burned out there."

Chalabre pressed his ear to the skin. Listening tensely, he could sense, rather than hear, detonations in the distance.

"It is coming nearer, nearer," said he who had listened. "I can hear the rifles of the soldiers plainly, those of the men fighting them less well."

"Strike camp and get ready," Chalabre ordered.

They were in the saddle and moving off within ten minutes. Save for the beating of hoofs on the pebbly soil, Chalabre could hear nothing. What had happened? The men said that the firing was coming nearer. Was de Bremond retreating? Or was he driving his foes back toward the water hole?

"A messenger or a fool," one of the horsemen announced.

He leveled his arm toward the south and, following the direction indicated, Chalabre saw a man on horseback approaching at a breakneck speed. He passed down a slope, crossed the flat space where he was not visible, and in a few minutes reappeared, waving his rifle above his head.

"That is Hassan," some one announced. "He has tidings."

The messenger came abreast, his swarthy face alight with excitement, eyes blazing in the dust smeared cheeks.

"*Baroud*," he panted, and fumbling in his cartridge pouch handed a slip of paper to Chalabre. Then he slid to the ground and stretched out to rest. His horse, quivering, and drenched with sweat, shook the foam from his mouth.

Chalabre read:

> Surprised. Ten men dropped first discharge. Half the animals lost. Clarey killed. Without water. Stand your ground at all cost, and give us a point of concentration. Dispatch warning to Hassi-Mazzer—DE BREMOND.

The lieutenant dismounted and shook the messenger by the shoulder.

"Thou, Hassan! The way is known to thee. Some one must ride back. Canst thou do it?"

"I can, Lieutenant—but my horse will drop."

"Take another, then."

Chalabre searched his pockets, found a pencil. His notebook was strapped securely in his saddle bag and there was no time to lose. He found a blank surface on the back of the slip received from de Bremond and, resting the paper against the moist leather of his saddle, scribbled hurriedly:

> Message received. Will fall back on the well and hold until you come—CHALABRE.

Hassan left.

"We turn back," Chalabre said laconically.

The Arabs knew when to question and when not.

CHALABRE had half expected such a catastrophe but he was bewildered by the rapidity with which his fears had been justified. Clarey was dead. One man had paid swiftly for his folly, blind, loyal ass that he was. Idiot! Going forth without a cordon of scouts thrown around his main body, carrying loot worth incalculable sums to the Berbers. Modern rifles, cartridges, mules which brought three hundred francs, sixty silver pieces, in the open market at Tafilalet. It was not the first time a detachment of the Legion had tempted fate once too often. There had been El Moungar, the crowning blunder of the past which had occurred in much the same fashion, and ended in slaughter.

De Bremond was showing, however, that he had not lost his spirit of decision. He knew that the greatest encouragement he could give his men was an assurance of refuge with water. And the presence of Chalabre on the field with the eight riders would not greatly affect the issue. Too bad the fool must be under high pressure to show his worth.

By all that was sacred, how would de Castex receive the news? Even though the detachment reached the water hole it would be a task to prevent de Bremond from blowing his brains out.

As soon as they reached the well Chalabre detailed four men to draw water and fill skins to be taken forward when the detachment came in sight. The others remained in the saddle. Chalabre wrote a brief report to be sent to Hassi-Mazzer.

> Located at well number one, southwestern route. Have just received word from Captain de Bremond that detachment, ambushed by unidentified natives, is badly cut up. Lieutenant Clarey killed. Am holding well with Mokhazenis, to assure water. Exact casualties not yet reported.—CHALABRE.

"What a howl there will be back there," Chalabre muttered after the messenger had left. "And I'll be blamed for it some way. De Bremond is perfectly capable of covering himself by refusing to admit his words. God—if he does, I'll lay my hands on him so that he'll never forget it. Dirty little politician that he is!"

SHORTLY before sunset shots were heard faintly, far off. De Bremond must have his work cut out, the sole officer in that bunch. The real criminal was the chap in the leather chair in the Ministry, who had penned the order recommending the little captain for active service.

In the reddish glow of after day, dim silhouettes appeared—mounted men. They halted several yards short of the well and discharged their carbines. They dispersed at the first answering shot and the flickering of their scattered fire receded into the dusk—enemy scouts who had turned the detachment and attempted to occupy the well to cut them off from water.

Then Hassan returned, having escaped miraculously, he declared. Men had pursued him, headed him off several times, but on each occasion his horsemanship had saved him. To prove his statements he stretched out his cloak, torn in three places. A moment later the other Mokhazeni arrived, reported the detachment in fairly good order, but retreating slowly, due to the number of wounded and the lack of mounts.

"The captain said all was well and permitted us both to return," Hassan said. "Two men the more would not matter. He is very near dead, the little chief. But he fought well."

"Is he wounded?"

"Much, very much. The first time he was struck in the side of the head near the right eye. The enemy knew him by his coat and kept firing. Then he was struck again in the knee. It was painful, no doubt, for he groaned. That was just after he had written the message when I was not yet gone. And when I went back, he had been wounded again, this time through the chest. He spat blood which is never a good sign. Then, when he was smitten for the fourth time, a bullet which shattered his shoulder, the sergeant who was still alive came and cut the coat off him and put it on himself. After that it was the sergeant who was singled out. I believe he fell, though I am not certain."

Chalabre could imagine the scene. The officer, conspicuous because of his stripes, and the non-com, who, as soon as his slow moving brain conceived the idea, took the badge of rank and its attendant danger. Simple heroism, unrewarded, unless dying in a captain's tunic might be considered reward.

Hassan went on to explain what had occurred.

"We were riding with the two officers, giving what information we could. There was a spur of rock flanking the trail. The first shots came from there, very near—as far as a man could run in one minute—then, all was confusion, and we fought."

With the night thick black, Chalabre thought it best not to go out to meet the detachment, even though the flashes of rifles on the near slopes were visible, dwindling, then ceasing suddenly.

AT LAST the survivors straggled in, thirty-two men, nineteen of them wounded. There were fourteen mules left; the rest had been killed or captured with the horses of the officers. The rifles and cartridges had been salvaged when possible. Chalabre stumbled through the crowd of bleeding, weary men, seeking de Bremond.

"Where's the captain?" he asked.

"Over there—" some one grasped Chalabre by the arm and led him forward.

Two forms were laid on the ground under the guard of one man who sat with rifle across his lap.

"Dead?" Chalabre bent near, scratched a match.

"Passed out five minutes ago when we had to shift him from one mule to another."

The match blazed up. Clarey—a calm, peaceful face, with a queer ironical smile twisting the white lips, and above the right eye a neat round hole rimmed with dark, dried blood.

Chalabre lighted another match. The gaunt, sensitive face was gone in a horror of smashed bones and blood. De Bremond had paid and suffered.

"Who's in charge?" Chalabre asked.

"I believe I am. The other surviving corporal is my junior," said a voice in the darkness.

"All right. Post sentries—and let the sound men keep awake for awhile longer until we're sure those slobs won't rush us. Lay the wounded near the well. I'll do all I can for them."

He risked lighting a lantern but was not fired upon. He passed from one man to another, applying bandages, pretending to do more than he was able. The last emergency dressing finished, he called the corporal and obtained the first coherent story of the attack. A complete surprise. No one expected to sight the enemy that day. There must have been two hundred and fifty men against them. After the first onslaught and the capture of a number of mules the enemy kept cover, firing steadily, sniping at the officer and sergeants. They had run out of water, but de Bremond kept telling them they could reach the well.

"Where are the captain's papers?" Chalabre asked.

"I don't know. The mule carrying his stuff was killed, I think. And his horse went down early. If he kept his papers in the saddle bags, as you do, Lieutenant —" the corporal grinned— "I don't volunteer for the job of looking for them."

Chalabre called Hassan.

"The writing I gave thee, what did the captain do with it, dost thou remember?"

"He placed it in his pocket. I remember well because I noticed there was blood on the paper after he handled it."

"And the coat was then taken by the sergeant?"

"Yes, the sergeant with the big mustaches."

"Did you bring his body in?" Chalabre asked the corporal.

"Faith, no, Lieutenant. I just made sure he was dead, then ran to catch up with the bunch."

"All right,' 'Chalabre concluded briefly.

He walked away, stared moodily into the darkness.

No one could believe that he had stayed behind without definite order. And only a damned fool would fail to see that once the trouble was under way, the well was the proper emplacement for him and his men.

But there were so many damned fools, so many . . .

"WHERE do I stand in all this, Colonel?" Chalabre asked.

He had returned to Hassi-Mazzer with the survivors, escorted by two companies of Algerian Tirailleurs dispatched to assist him. His report to the commander-in-chief filed, de Castex had called him in to talk with him privately.

"Your appointment to the Meharistes may be held up for a while," de Castex said. "Too bad that written order was lost. It would have justified your presence so far in the rear, justified, above all, your sticking tight to the sole refuge available."

"The Mokhazenis will swear that I gave immediate order to go to de Bremond's aid."

"They have been questioned. They know your actions, that's all. De Bremond's statements to his men? They would have been made in any case to encourage them. I don't think you'll be annoyed further. Every one will be anxious to hush up this nasty mess."

Indeed, Chalabre's comrades were kind, understanding that he would have prefered to fall with Clarey and de Bremond rather than be suspected of inability and, what was worse, cowardice. It was often unluckier to be among the survivors than among the dead. No one mentioned the matter to him.

Two weeks later, however, *Le Camelot*, a royalist newspaper, and *Le Clairon*, were in the messroom. Chalabre found himself looking through the pages eagerly as he had done twelve days before to learn of de Bremond. Now, he also was famous or, rightly, infamous.

The editorials in *Le Camelot* lauded the courage of de Bremond and heaped scorn on his worthless second. A lieutenant colonel, professor in a military school, called Louis Chalabre either a fool or a craven. A cavalry diversion, in the midst of the action, would have saved lives, turned defeat into victory. He advanced as undeniable that given principles of war hold true regardless of country or foe.

"Soreheads," Chalabre commented. "It was to be expected; de Bremond was their pet."

He picked up *Le Clairon*. There he hoped to find consolation.

The era of political murders is evidently not ended. Regardless of difference in opinions, Captain de Bremond was a man to be admired. His case is parallel to that of the Prince Imperial, son of Napoleon III, left to be butchered by the Zulus, while his British comrades fled. De Bremond was rushed into an expedition, placed with a man who could be trusted to serve the purpose of those above him, being the son and grandson of gentlemen notoriously loyal to the army clique. He was dead before he left France. The knives of the tribesmen struck the blow, but who conceived the plan? An open court martial of Lieutenant Chalabre, Louis, is needed, a full investigation which shall not respect personalities. There are occasions when dirty linen should be washed publicly.

CHALABRE was stunned. Mechanically he took his place at one end of the mess table. The plate held for him by the orderly was a white blur. A sympathetic silence greeted him. Then a young lieutenant of Tirailleurs spoke up.

"Who has read the newspapers?" When no one answered, he resumed, "*Bon Dieu*, don't they go after Chalabre!"

"Bah! Myself or anybody else, what's the odds."

A burly captain seated on his right filled his wine glass.

"What do you care, old man, we know."

"Yes," some one spoke up. "We don't judge by appearances."

"What 'appearances?'" Chalabre snapped out.

"Well, without offending you, it was peculiar, your being behind with the horsemen—when you should have been scouting. And you could have left four men at the well—"

"Young man," interrupted the captain, "all things are easy after they're over."

The major spoke up gruffly:

"Experts have won more battles than Napoleon—in theory. And newspapers—" he glared about him menacingly—" are stupid and lying."

"An officer of the Dragoons won the horseshow," a Spahi subaltern announced.

Chalabre drained his wine glass and smiled. He lingered over cognac and coffee for the space of a cigaret. After he left the messroom he went at once to see de Castex. The colonel, for some reason, came into his office in a bad humor.

"What do you want?"

"Leave of absence, Colonel."

"Ah, where do you want to go?"

"To France . . ."

De Castex thrust his hands in his pockets, paced the floor nervously, then came to a halt before Chalabre.

"Why?"

"I have a little account to settle, Colonel."

"Ah? You want to fight editors, also? That brings luck, doesn't it? You wish to make an ass of yourself? Does a man notice dung? Ignore them, ignore them! Don't go waving your sword in Paris. They'd soon tell you where you should have waved it. Am I not termed a silly old fool, an incapable sword dragger by by all the rotten sheets in France? Do I worry? A week ago, it was suggested that the best way for me to employ my sword would be to become a sword swallower. Do I weep? Leave of absence? No! No! Get out of here . . ."

Chalabre got out. But before he had gone ten feet on the veranda, de Castex called him back.

"Where are you going, Chalabre?"

"Back to my room, Colonel."

"To brood. Well, I order you to go out—let's see—to the Eden Palace, the new gin mill. You're going to have a good time, get drunk like a gentleman and sleep it off. By morning you'll have forgotten. Now, that's an order. Have you any money of your own just now?" De Castex reached in the inside pocket of his white tunic. "You have? Good! Now get out—I'll send Fangeas to see whether you're there, so don't try to sneak away."

Shaken out of his mood by the colonel's vigorous speech, Chalabre left the barracks and walked rapidly through the badly cobbled streets toward the Eden Palace.

A VAST hall, twice as long as wide, plank flooring sprinkled with sawdust, the palace was kept by Monsieur Albert, and kept to the best standards of garrison town music halls. Rows of acetylene lamps flared on the walls, walls glistening with blue tiles and long mirrors, further adorned by great placards advertising spirituous liquors. Marble topped tables, round, rimmed with brass, supported by curved metal tripods had been imported.

Albert was aware that in a frontier town officers were reluctant to mingle with troopers, non-coms and natives. Therefore, there had been erected on

either side of the hall, crates which Albert termed loges, plank booths, screened or not as desired, and reached by a steep stairway—nothing more than a ladder with a velvet covered hand rope, greasy from the contact of many sweaty palms.

The ceiling was so low one could not stand upright without risking a bump. In the crowded quarters legs were tangled beneath tables and sword scabbards offered stumbling blocks. By luck, Chalabre fell among acquaintances; the lieutenant commanding the artillery detachment, and three officers of Tirailleurs.

The tiny stage at one end was flanked by an old piano. On the other side of the planking was the bar, a long sweep of scrubbed zinc plating, shining like silver. Behind it, tiers of bottles, barrels and a trapdoor leading to the cellar. The hall was crowded, Tirailleurs, Spahis, Zouaves, native soldiers and Legionaires. Arabs in white *burnous* remained aloof alike from Christians and native soldiers. There were also traders, the scavengers who follow troops in remote places of the earth, men of all breeds, Spaniards, Italians, Maltese, Syrians.

A reek of leather, sweat, stale beer, perfume, sour wine, tobacco smoke, rose chokingly. A young man with a shaven skull, in shirt sleeves, sat upon the stool before the piano, heavy marching boots caressing the pedals, thick red fingers on the keys. His hands moved in a sentimental flourish and a waltz floated from the rickety instrument.

A stir down below, a low hum rose, swelled and broke into clear singing. Automatically the waiter slipped glasses before Chalabre, one succeeding the other. Women filed upon the stage, all in various degrees of decrepitude. The Oranese-South is one of the last stopping places. The crowd was charitable, applauded, returned the kisses flung from the tips of coarse fingers.

Through the haze, Chalabre distinguished an Arab, seated with his back to the wall, watching gravely, with a hint of disdain on his lips. A long nose surmounted a fine, black mustache. The chin, fringed with beard, was firm.

A Tirailleur officer had noticed also. He nudged Chalabre.

"A son of the great tent, I'll bet," he said, meaning that the man was from the desert and of good birth.

The tumult ceased. The tinkling of the piano resounded clearly. A new girl had come out and, marvel of marvels, she was young. She sang in Spanish, danced. Finally, she took a flower from her hair and tossed it into the crowd. Whether by design or accident it fell on the cloak of the Arab. With a gesture of the shoulder he allowed it to fall to the floor and went on smoking.

A Legionaire rose, bearing on his sleeves the chevrons of corporal. An immense back stretched the cloth of his tunic, rising like a block of wood from the pale blue sash molding his waist over which was buckled the military belt supporting bayonet and scabbard. He moved toward the stranger. Men parted to let him pass. The Arab did not perceptibly stir, yet his cloak opened and the hilts of knives glinted in his belt.

Chalabre slid down the ladder and reached the corporal whom he recognized as the Circassian who had been with the section. At the same time waiters—Legionaires off duty—arrived, rolling up their sleeves.

"Go back to your table, Corporal," Chalabre said calmly.

"He threw the flower on the floor," the man replied in broken French.

He was drunk and resented scorn for a woman he would have liked himself. He hesitated a moment, then turned away, grinning sheepishly.

"His brain is not his own," Chalabre told the Arab, in his own tongue. "It would have brought thee trouble to wound or kill him. The ways of this place are not thine."

"I came from the *bled* to see. Indeed, I do not like it. I leave tonight."

Chalabre went back to his booth.

"He was in a bad plight," he felt called upon to explain to the other officers. "If

he took the flower he was in for trouble, being a native. And when he didn't it was resented."

The drink had taken little effect. He was used to stronger alcohol, mixed in the scummy water of the wells to make it drinkable.

PRESENTLY Fangeas' round head emerged from the stairway. He slid into a chair beside Chalabre.

"I'm here, you see," Chalabre said mockingly. "The Old Man was wrong, this hasn't done me any good."

Fangeas laughed. He was obviously ill at ease. He waited until the other officers were concentrated on the stage, then nudged Chalabre meaningly.

"Come away from here. I have something important to tell you."

They descended the ladder and went into a quiet street where the silence was broken only by a rumble from the Eden Palace and the rhythmical tread of far off patrols.

"What is it, Fangeas?"

"You're to be placed under rigorous arrest as soon as you get back to barracks."

"*Nom d'un chien!*" Chalabre exclaimed, still smiling. "What have I done?"

"It's about the de Bremond mess—you know—"

"But the Old Man told me not to worry."

"Official telegram came—that's what kept me so long, decoding it. You're to be sent north for court martial. The colonel is crazy with rage but must obey."

"Trial to take place at Oran, then. The damned fools—what can they charge me with?"

"You're to go to France under guard. An investigation will take place. The papers are howling."

"I know it!"

"It seems that some nut or other is using the incident to try and shake the Ministry. Some one has to be pestered and I guess you're him. The colonel told me to warn you so you won't be too surprised when you get to your quarters. Also, he thought you might have something to attend to in town, before being held."

Chalabre grasped Fangeas by the arm, swung him around, so that their faces were close together.

"Come on, tell me what de Castex thinks—the truth—"

"He thinks you're in a bad way. If the authorities get you away from those who know you, they can very well charge you with gross neglect of duty and insurbordination. They need a scapegoat."

"What does the colonel advise me to do? I know he said something more which you don't dare speak."

"He says you should sign a resignation of commission, date it four or five days back, and he'll—"

"That would be an admission of guilt."

"God—don't you understand? Some one must be the goat regardless. The Old Man fears it will mean a term—"

Chalabre released his grip and laughed.

"Tell him not to worry."

"You'll do as he says?"

"I'll think it over—" Chalabre shrugged. "It's hard to decide so quickly. A resignation—I'll think it over. Thanks, Fangeas."

Fangeas left, turned before rounding the corner.

"I'll see you soon, then," he called out.

CHALABRE walked about in the narrow, deserted streets, his head whirling.

Arrest, sooner or later. He must go back to his room and submit to arrest. No one would gruffly lay a rough hand on him and announce the loss of his liberty. Things were not done that way. De Castex would not permit such humiliation. But he would be under arrest, nevertheless.

He recalled the years in school and at the Military Academy later. Walls, walls, doors, locks, barred windows. His dread of being confined had been so great that several times the head master had been compelled to confer with his father.

The Old Man had understood and reasoned with him, told him that unless he submitted patiently to this great period of trial he would never be a soldier and officer.

Those years, it seems had been wasted. Suffering gone for nothing. And study had not been easy. He had learned quickly and was able to apply his knowledge if left alone. But the tedious lessons learned by rote, compositions on topics that held no interest for him, had been sheer torture.

Everywhere, his comrades had called him *le bico*, slang for Arab. *Le bico* had obeyed skinny, tyranical masters, sweated on warm afternoons when the thought of the open drove him mad. The bitterness of those days rose in him again, left a nasty taste in his mouth.

It had always been the same. He had found himself in a world where money or cringing obedience to superiors was needed. Boy and man he had walked among Frenchmen without feeling one with them. Without envy, he had seen studious, boot licking chaps win the coveted assignments at the Academy, become artillerymen, engineeers.

The army, for him, had but one branch—the cavalry. And there was but one cavalry, the North African regiments.

HE PRESSED his forehead with his hands, stared about him. He had halted automatically before a narrow door in a blank wall, a windowless rampart looming over the street. Without thought, his aimless strides had brought him to a native café he often visited.

There could be no harm in taking a last look at the place. He had been happy there. He gave the door a tentative push and a panel swung away noiselessly. He entered a narrow hall, lighted by an oil lamp in a socket fastened near the opposite end. The door closed behind him.

He was familiar with the place, passed the first building and crossed the patio, in the center of which a jet of water gleamed in the starlight like a rod of crystal. Then he knocked upon another door which was opened by a small boy.

"Greetings, my lord."

"Greetings, Messaoud, child of evil," Chalabre replied.

Within the room a dozen men were sprawled on mats on the floor, smoking. The sight of the brass buttons on the officer's tunic brought him a certain instant attention, which ended when he was recognized. He lifted his hand, smiled and followed the boy.

In another room were three old men. One sat alone, in a corner, mumbling in an undertone and fingering a rosary. The other two granted him a passing salute and turned back to the chess board between them. Chalabre gave his coat and *képi* to the lad and sat down in another corner.

"I've told my master that thou art here," the boy said, when he returned with a tray which bore the usual fare—coffee, native pastry and a supply of tobacco.

"There was no need. Yet what is done is done."

El Mezzian, the owner, came soon after, touched Chalabre's hand and sat down at his side. He glanced into the Frenchman's eyes, then swung his head in a strange, pathetic movement.

"Much trouble?"

"Much. But it will pass, *insha Allah*."

"In another room," Mezzian whispered, "there is music and dancing. That sometimes dispels the deepest gloom of the young."

"Not mine."

The restraint which Chalabre felt with Fangeas was gone. And yet he did not speak. Sympathy and no questions, that was what he wanted.

He looked around the room. It was unlikely that he would ever come here again. De Castex feared and when the colonel feared, one had reason to fear. He was not easily swept by panic.

Trial, by judges already prejudiced, pressed from above and beneath to give

the mob a victim. Dislike of defeat is a peculiarity of no one race. But the French are the quickest to clamor for an explanation outside the immediate facts. Where there is defeat there must be treason.

Neglect of duty and insubordination, harsh charges, which called for stringent punishment. Chalabre was convicted in advance. Reason told him that it was impossible for sane men to blame him. Yet innocent men had been sent to Guiana, where even now rotting there in jail.

There had been the famous case of a few years ago. A captain condemned to life imprisonment on Devil's Island. The proof of guilt had not been clear. Before the debates had been in progress twenty-four hours, the press had taken sides, contributed to what many believe to be an injustice. And the man had friends, relatives, money to fight his cause.

Chalabre was alone, save for a few friends of his father's, men like de Castex who were not able politicians, did not know how to pull the strings. Probably the court martial would be held secretly—to avoid scandal reflecting upon the army. The findings would be given out and every one would be satisfied.

Stranger things had happened. Chalabre recalled the case of a young lieutenant forced to suicide for a minor fault by a dour old colonel. Human enough, those court martial judges, when taken one by one; good men, kind to their wives and fond of their children. But without souls when in group, thinking only to uphold their reputation as unbending chiefs.

An example! That sacred word that one heard constantly. He would be made an example. An example of what, an example for whom? For having, one moment, consented to act without written order, and later, with the lives of a half hundred men in the balance, neglected to preserve a piece of paper. Chalabre knew that his story was logical. That was the trouble; the story was so logical that it could not be believed, would be thought to have been made up afterward. There is nothing less convincing than the truth.

The glaring facts remained. He who had been sent to advise de Bremond had been miles from the point of attack in the rear. And he had not gone toward the sound of the fighting, as an officer is presumed to do in field service unless possessing definite orders to the contrary. He foresaw the skeptical smiles, the speeches of the attorney, the maudlin replies of his lawyer, the beefy faces, the cold eyes in wrinkled sockets, the pessimistic lift of gray mustaches. Acts of indiscipline he had been guilty of when a young man, sharp retorts to superiors, a hundred forgotten incidents would be revived now, piled into a heap, written into the records, bolstering, brick by brick, a formidable wall of accusation.

Would he submit to that? His body stiffened.

Acquittal was impossible. The least penalty would be compulsory resignation. More likely, prison, a cell, grated loophole, pacing of sentries outside, short promenades in a prison yard. His lungs would ache at night for the want of air, his limbs would soften from lack of exercise. His stomach would grow heavy, pouchy, on prison fare. And he would be turned out, after an indefinite time, a branded man.

"SHOULD a man submit to what is unjust, Mezzian?" he asked abruptly.

"No. Allah has granted us sense that we may judge right from wrong, the just from the unjust. If one does not act according to his own judgment he might as well have been born a dog, the offspring of a long line of cringing curs."

"Well said," Chalabre approved, with a faint smile of self derision. "Oh, thou who art very wise, Mezzian, what dost thou think of one who loses his liberty when he has a chance to keep it?"

"He is no longer a man who is not free."

"Then I am no longer a man," Chalabre muttered.

It was two in the morning. Whoever was waiting for him was growing impatient. He must go. The boy brought his belongings, he shook hands with Mezzian and went out.

Passing through the common room, where the *kif* smokers were still lying about, he started. The Arab he had seen at the Eden Palace was there, squatted against the wall, legs folded underneath him, smoking a cigaret instead of a pipe. He was heavier than Chalabre first realized. The strength of his limbs indicated that he came from Berber stock.

"Greetings! We meet again, Lieutenant," he said, smiling.

"Thou wert to leave tonight."

"I could not. It appears that thy brethren will allow none to enter or leave the city without speaking a certain word, which I know not. Yet, thou dost know it? It would assist me greatly as I have agreed to meet friends far from here at daylight."

"Thou knowest full well that the word is not to be given to strangers."

"It did not harm to ask."

"No," Chalabre admitted. "Where is thy home?"

"Far off, many days' journey. I was born in the Draa country."

"Thou art then a Berber?"

"Through my mother I boast such blood. I journeyed a long way to come here. Men had told me much of the wonders of your cities. I find nothing but houses and things that any one with money can purchase."

"Art thou a friend of the French?"

"I am but a lone man, come here peacefully." The Berber smiled. "I see thee here, and I have heard that what thou dost witness in this place is not a part of thy other life."

Chalabre made an effort to break off the conversation and leave. An invincible force rooted him to the spot.

"Have the French yet conquered thy home?" he asked.

"No, and they will not come for many years."

"What would my greeting be were I to go with thee as the guest of Allah?"

"The sacred law says that hospitality is due in the name of Allah, and we obey the law." The Berber looked at the Frenchman with a show of interest. "Art thou jesting?"

"Tell me," Chalabre insisted. "Would I be welcome?"

"Art thou of the true faith?"

"Yes. My own God has forsaken me."

The Berber rose, came near. He was half a head taller than Chalabre. The stateliness of his bearing, the easy grace of his stride, were impressive. Here was a man who had never known bounds, who had never slept behind a door. He embraced Chalabre, touched his shoulder with his lips.

"Come," he said.

"I have no horse."

"One is thine for the asking, friend."

He led Chalabre into the yard. The lieutenant followed him as in a dream. They halted in the roofless space where the horses were tied. The Berber indicated two sturdy animals.

"One for me, one for a companion. He can come later; I shall leave word."

He led the two horses into the yard and spoke to the young servant. Then he unfolded a *burnous* strapped behind the saddle of the second horse.

"Why this?" Chalabre asked.

"Thou art fleeing, I know, for why else does a man such as thee leave his people, save that they have turned from him?"

Chalabre draped the striped garments over his shoulders, pulled the hood over his forehead to hide his face. He tossed his *képi* away. The narrow toed riding boots were worn by many wealthy natives. He mounted. The boy opened the outer gate.

"It was written from the beginning that we should meet," the Berber said as they rode through the streets.

"The Berbers are many. What branch is thine?"

"It as yet little known. We call ourselves the Ouled el Seif."

"The Sons of the Sword," Chalabre repeated. "The name is worthy."

THEY arrived at the bare area cleared by the engineers between the last houses and the surrounding wall of the city. The challenge of a sentry halted them. A patrol came forward, led by a native sergeant of Tirailleurs carrying a lantern.

"Who are you two?" he asked.

"We are Mokhazenis," Chalabre replied, "going back to our tents, as long as there is no fighting for us."

"O scurvy ones, have we need of you?" The non-com scoffed. "But if you have permission to leave the word has been given you."

"*Mazagran.*"

"*Mazagran*, that is right," the sergeant admitted. He held up the lantern, peered at the two faces under the hoods casually. "Truly, brothers, there is no understanding the Christians. Until tonight none of them were to be interfered with in their comings and goings. Then I was told not longer than an hour ago to allow no Christian to pass without summoning an officer. You are not pork eaters, so go in peace!"

"We have further proof," Chalabre added jokingly.

"Be off, be off!"

"Peace on thee—no evil befall thine."

The two horsemen passed through the southern gate, the gate under which Chalabre had ridden at de Bremond's side. Now they had set sentries to watch for him. Probably it had been reported that he had not returned to his quarters. They had forgotten, fools to the end, that he was of the land and spoke its tongue.

For miles they traveled without speaking. Chalabre listened tensely for the hoofbeats of pursuing riders. An hour passed. Another. The Berber drew his horse to a halt.

"We are safe," he said.

The Frenchman turned in the saddle. glanced in the direction of Hassi-Mazzer. He discerned nothing save the blanket of night dusted with gleaming, silvery points. The wind swept across his face with the caressing touch of a loving hand.

"This is the end of many things," he told his companion.

"Each end is also a beginning. Even death is the beginning of Paradise."

"Good words, wise words," Chalabre admitted. "The thirsty man does not ask the source of the water offered him. I have not even asked thee thy name."

"My name—" the Berber laid his hand on Chalabre's arm—"my name will be known to many. I am Khebba ben Khellaf."

CHAPTER II

THE REDOUBT

LIEUTENANT DELAND rose to adjust the wooden blinds, sat down again before the work table in his office, lighted a cigaret and picked up the report addressed to him by the military governor. A courier had brought it to the redoubt of El Tess from Hassi-Mazzer, two hundred miles north.

Having just awakened from the early afternoon nap, Raoul Deland was in good humor. Twenty-three, not unpleasant to look upon, fine features, crisp black hair and steady eyes, it was obvious that he had not been embittered by the ruggedness of his surroundings. He smiled as he picked up the sheaf of notes signed by Captain Fangeas, intelligence officer at headquarters. He knew it would show evidence of having flowed from the same pen that had composed many articles dealing with the Sahara published lately in French reviews.

SIX YEARS ago (the report began) the man of greatest importance in the Occidental Sahara was Sherf Mulay Mustefa, Pasha of Tafilalet. A victory over the mounted detachment of the Second Legion commanded by Captain de Bremond had brought him

additional prestige. His sway seemed all the more certain because of the transfer of Colonel de Castex to a regiment of cavalry in France. De Castex's successor, upon instructions from the Ministry, attempted negotiations. Sherf Mustefa promised, evaded, compromised, but signed no treaty. When he chose, he would raid friendly *douars*, even attack the convoys taking supplies to our southernmost posts, then resume parley.

In the region of the Draa Plateau, a new leader appeared in the meanwhile. He did not come under our attention as he owed neither allegiance to the Mauritanian rebels nor to the Sherf Mulay Mustefa. Little was known of him, and for more than a year he was nothing more than a name, Khebba ben Khellaf.

As a matter of fact, his warlike activities in the rear of our foes served us. The few informers we had in his territories sent in reports, which were confirmed later. Khebba ben Khellaf was born in the Draa, of a woman belonging to one of the local tribes and a roaming preacher. Later, the holy man took his family across the desert to his birthplace, in the hills of Tripolitania. Khebba ben Khellaf came to the attention of the British Government for his activities in the Egyptian Sudan. Returning from the pilgrimage to Mecca, he had combined his father's gift of eloquence with more martial tendencies.

The leaders of his own breed became wary of him, dreaded his all consuming ambition and he was forced to leave. He came to his birthplace, the Occidental Sahara, accompanied by over a hundred followers, fierce, religious fanatics of vague Targui extraction who call themselves the Sons of the Sword. His *khalif*, his second, is believed to be a former officer in the Turkish army.

For months, it was rumored that this second was a French renegade. It was claimed that he was recognized as Lieutenant Chalabre, an officer of cavalry who vanished from Hassi-Mazzer on the eve of his arrest before court martial, accused of grave offenses against the army. This was officially disproved when the Secret Service made public that they knew Chalabre's whereabouts, that he had been traced to Oran and from thence to a South American country.

Consultation of Turkish records have failed to make certain the *khalif's* identity, a number of their officers having at one time or another vanished, particularly after the Italian conquest. He is known as El Rhezim, the Lead Rope, from his successful raids against the foes of his master. He is a man of average height, among natives, and is said to speak French fluently.

With Khebba ben Khellaf he has vanquished numerous minor chieftains. Basing claim on his mother's blood, Khebba has become the leader of several hundred tents. He looms as an important figure. Thus far, emissaries sent to him have failed to obtain a pact to fight on our side and accept our protectorate. On the contrary, the latest report states that Khebba ben Khellaf and Sherf Mulay Mustefa have at last come to an understanding. That brings under one rule many tribes. A few Chamba gatherings are already faltering in their allegiance to us.

What amounts to a confederation against France is well under way. Khebba ben Khellaf is said to seek Europeans to serve him. There are already several in his *entourage*. Among them is Barthez, a former officer in the Spanish army, who deserted from Rio di Oro after being implicated in gun smuggling to the Mauritanian rebels.

The redoubt of El Tess is midway between the Draa and our establishments. If Khebba ben Khellaf succeeded in gaining control of the nearby native town of Ain-el-Gara, he could use the oasis as a base when he attacked the redoubt. His ambition is dangerous. He is a spiritual leader of thousands. While he has as yet done nothing distinctly hostile to us, the mere presence of such a power on our frontier is a cause of worry. Sooner or later, we must come to grips.

The situation is so grave that Colonel de Castex has been recalled to the

Oranese-South. Until further notice, Lieutenant Deland must treat Mulud ben Brahim, Kaid of Ain-el-Gara, with great consideration and avoid friction at any cost. Within the near future his loyalty may be of prime importance. Patrols must be kept within sight of the walls and greatest vigilance exerted. Meanwhile, reinforcements are being brought into Hassi-Mazzer from Bel Abbes and Saida.

Captain Martel has been assigned to the El Tess Redoubt, and will leave here two days after the courier's departure.

DELAND'S face darkened. He had hoped to remain in command until his leave. On second thought he would not be displeased to work under Captain Martel who was one of the pioneers of France in Morocco. Of course the assignment conveyed a veiled distrust of his ability.

Deland had been in charge of the redoubt since it's construction a year before. Originally, he was not an African soldier. His career had been shaped when his battalion of Chasseurs had been sent to Morocco. When the Metropolitan troops were sent home Deland asked to be transfered into the Legion, attracted by the possibility of adventure. Soon, however, he was sent, with his section, away from picturesque Morocco into the desert.

The redoubt of El Tess was on one of the two hills jutting high from the desert plain. Cresting the opposite hill three miles away was the native *ksar* of Ain-el-Gara. The Kaid, who ruled like a feudal lord of the Dark Ages over the inhabitants, was allied to the French, had signed a pact with the government. In exchange for fifty Lebel rifles and ammunition, for privilege of trade in the zone of French influence, he guaranteed that the water hole of the palm oasis, sprawled between the two rises of soil, would not be used by armed men hostile to France. With native character changeable as the surface of the sea there was always a chance that the Kaid would end the agreement.

He had consented to the construction of the redoubt. The fortification was simple; a typical Legion outpost in the desert. Around a rectangle one hundred meters by fifty, a deep moat had been dug, the earth thrown inward to form a wall which was further reinforced with large rocks and patches of sun baked bricks. A network of barbed wire surrounded the whole. Within the enclosure were cubical huts, officers' quarters, storeroom, hospital, built of brick. The privates had erected crude shelters for themselves from boards torn from packing cases, canvas, bleached lengths of palm trunks. Perched on spindly supports twenty-five feet into the air was a sort of plank booth, the mirador, constantly occupied by a watchman.

Deland folded the report, filed it. He stood before the map on the wall, whistled thoughtfully. Placing his right hand flat upon the chart, the index finger pointed straight to Hassi-Mazzer, the extended thumb to Khebba's holdings. Where the thumb joined the hand was the exact spot of the tiny circle marking Ain-el-Gara and the minute square of the redoubt.

The direct path between the Draa and Hassi-Mazzer, a diagonal line between the extremities of the index and the thumb, crossed an arid stretch, impassable for a numerous army burdened with pack camels and cavalry. Between the Draa and the oasis, between the oasis and Hassi-Mazzer, several water holes were indicated.

"We're the key, all right," Deland mused. "Of course, the *harka* of Khebba and Sherf Mulay Mustefa might gather at Tafilalet and launch the attack from there. But that would leave the mountain tribes, who do not like the Sherf over much, on one flank within possible striking distance."

Deland read the direct orders he had received. He was to have his detachment ready to move.

HE WENT out immediately, found the Legionaires in various stages of undress loafing about heedless of the broiling sun. The oblong yard resembled at the same time a Gipsy camp

and a mushroom town of the goldfields. Deland beckoned to the bugler, who reported with his instrument.

The brassy notes brought feverish activity. The detachment, composed of forty-four men, three non-coms, thirty-two mules, assembled swiftly. Then men and mounts waited, motionless.

Each animal bore the regulation load. Saddle, forty kilos of oats, thirty-two kilos of food for its riders, two tin containers holding two quarts apiece and the bewildering assortment of equipment, pots and pans, coffee grinders, tents, blankets, spare clothing, reserve cartridges, first aid kit, fastened securely, each in its place. No. 1 of each team stood ready to mount, while No. 2, on the off side, was ready to help his comrade into the saddle between the packs.

Deland turned to his second, Sub-lieutenant Stazewski.

"Pretty good! You know your trade, Stazewski."

"Nonsense, they like you," Stazewski replied. "Let some guy come down who gets off on the wrong foot and they'll be lazier than snails. That's what makes us different from the line or the *bicos*. The man counts."

Three months before Stanilas Stazewski had replaced the first sub-lieutenant who had died of sunstroke. His leaning toward strong drink was the fable of the Legion. He was almost twenty years older than Deland. The flesh of his face was firm, red, clinging to the bones. A stained yellow mustache slashed under the purple nose. The glare of his eyes when angry had been compared to the flickering flame of burning cognac. Today they were mild, a trifle murky in their red rims.

He followed Deland as he inspected each man, each animal, testing a buckle here, a knot there.

"It's a false alarm this time," Deland said to the detachment after the ceremony was over, "but the next time will be serious. We're going to have an old time captain here, lads, and it wouldn't do any harm to snap up a bit in appearance. Those magnificent beards I behold must fall before night, or be trimmed to show the collar badge according to regulations. On the whole I am satisfied. All punishments lifted. Double wine ration tonight."

On the way back to his quarters Deland told Stazewski what he had learned.

"It means active service, sure," Stazewski declared. "When the rumor of fighting starts, it generally comes. And they're not bringing reinforcements to Hassi-Mazzer to swell the receipts of the local gin mills. My hunch is, that if this fellow, Khebba, doesn't attack soon, we will. It's got to be settled one way or another. And we know which way it will be."

"What do you know of Captain Martel?"

"What I've heard—just talk. He started in the Legion, then was assigned to native affairs in Morocco. Still figures on the rolls of our regiment, though. Said to be a nice fellow. I hope he hasn't changed." Stazewski grinned cheerfully. "He's got a good name, anyway. *Martel* is good cognac."

"Should be here in three or four days."

"Perhaps three—leaving two days after the courier and traveling a bit slower."

TWO NIGHTS later Deland was awakened by his orderly, late in the night.

"New chief just arrived, Lieutenant. He's in the office."

"I heard nothing. Did he come alone?"

"One native with him—a guide." The private glowed. "You can't tell by the looks of him he ain't afraid to travel light!"

Deland dressed hurriedly and went to greet his superior. A lamp had been lighted in the office. A man, seated at the work table rose.

"Good evening, Lieutenant!"

"Welcome, Captain Martel!"

Captain Martel was a strong, agile man in the thirties, above medium height, wide of shoulders. The lean legs, the elegance of the red leather boots, the

powerful hands, impressed Deland. His eyes were blue, the glance gentle and at the same time resolute. On the tunic of the dusty khaki uniform beneath the red lined coat was the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor, ornamented by the rosette. The collar, unfastened on a tanned, muscular neck, revealed the edge of a striped undershirt such as privates wore.

"My guide picked good camels and short cuts," Martel said, "so that I drop in ahead of schedule, probably as welcome as a dog in a bowling alley."

"Everything is ready, Captain," Deland stated. "What is the news from Hassi-Mazzer?"

"Nothing new." Martel brought out several envelopes which Deland recognized by size and color. "These came after the courier left. I thought you'd like to have them before the next messenger."

"Thank you for the trouble. From my fiancée—"

"You better quit this business soon, then. It's unlucky for married men," Martel offered soberly.

The orderly appeared, bringing a tray with bottles. Stanzewski followed an instant later. The sound of a cork being drawn usually brought him. He had been on watch and had admitted the captain so that introductions were not needed. Martel glanced at the veteran's medals.

"Old time Tonkinese, I see—"

"Seven years, three sojourns, Captain."

The talk swung to Morocco, where Deland and Martel had served. Stazewski had landed in the Sultanate with the first detachments. Martel told of his missions among dissident tribes. His French was correct, yet he managed to give his words a lilting swing that recalled the barbaric songs of the Frankish warriors. Deland listened to him, fascinated.

Presently he recalled his duty as host.

"Pardon us for keeping you talking, Captain. You need rest. I'll show you to your quarters."

They parted with a cordial handshake.

IN THE morning Deland escorted the captain on a tour of inspection. Martel regarded the redoubt with professional interest. His gaze lingered for some time on the native city in the distance.

The aggregation of walls and terraces, dominated by the massive *kasbah* resembled certain old battlements seen in France. There were the loopholed, jagged walls, against which were adjusted squat, square towers, staring into space through many slit-like windows.

Ain-el-Gara, once famed as a stopping place for the caravans plying between Morocco and the Sudan, the last port of call for centuries, of the desert convoys on the northern shore of the waterless sea, the Bled el Ateush, Land of Thirst. Here, *sokhrars*, camelmen, traders and servants, the warriors of the escorts, spent a last riotous night before the dreary weeks on the sand and across the pitiless barren *hammadas*. Here in the past, thousands of blacks, brought in chains from the Niger Loop, had caught their first sight of an unknown country. Here they had been met by buyers from all over the Islamic world. Here, the pashas of the sultan fallen into disgrace had found refuge, waited until their evil doings were forgotten and gone forth once more to recoup fortune and position at court. There were pockmarks in certain walls made by the huge lead balls of arquebuses and wheel muskets. Deland never looked toward the battlements on the ragged bluff without a thrill of pleasure.

Martel, also seemed impressed.

When they went back into the small dining room for lunch, Stazewski was waiting for them.

"By the way," Martel said abruptly. "I'll ask you not to drop around Mulud's place until further notice, Lieutenant Deland."

"Agreed, Captain." Deland tried to conceal his surprise. "When may I grant permission for the men to go to the oasis? I kept them here not wishing absentees when you arrived."

"You permit the men to go out?" Martel asked with displeasure.

"The watchman on the mirador can see an approach for miles. A signal will bring them back. And this is a lonely dump."

"That shall stop. Do they indulge in any other pastimes?"

"Well, a native peddler comes here, sells paper, pens, needles and so forth openly and, as a matter of course, booze on the sly. I believe it best to close my eyes—no great harm was done—he can't sell alcohol in sufficient quantities to bring drunkenness."

"The next time he shows up have the sentries kick him out. I don't want natives hanging around. They might be informers."

"The men will be dissatisfied, Captain."

"What about it? Give orders this afternoon, immediately, to end all communication between the men and the native population."

Deland hesitated, then added—

"Does that include the workmen I loaned Mulud ben Brahim to direct the repairs on the walls of the fortress?"

"It does, Lieutenant."

At roll call the orders were read to the assembled detachment. Hardened to stringent discipline, nevertheless the privates murmured audibly. Deland sympathized with them but could not protest.

THREE days went by. Martel did not leave the redoubt. Deland could not understand this course of action. Mulud ben Brahim would be offended even if he had heard that a new commander had arrived. At length Deland made bold to hint of this to Martel. The captain looked at him coldly and turned his back.

"What do you think is going on?" Deland asked Stazewski

"Funny, but he may be one of those moral chaps."

"I don't mean the orders to the men. Ignoring Mulud—"

"Say, he speaks the lingo, knows the breed," Stazewski protested, conveying in his words that Deland was ignorant compared with Martel.

Awakened by shots during the night, Deland went out to discover that the sentries had fired upon some one stirring outside the wire, at Martel's order. Deland knew who the prowlers were, women from the town, roaming about the redoubt, puzzled by the absence of their friends. In the morning, a woman, known by sight to all within the redoubt, was found dead, slumped over the lower strand.

"Every time they come around, fire," Martel ordered. "I want it understood that this place isn't a brothel."

At noon, a messenger from Mulud ben Brahim arrived. Martel refused to see him, forbade conversation with him. The messenger left, saying he would return later.

"I don't understand what you're doing, Captain," Deland exploded.

"You're not expected to, Lieutenant," Martel retorted. "Have you a copy of the pact signed by Mulud ben Brahim?"

Deland produced the document which the captain read carefully.

"Those guns have been delivered, haven't they?" he asked in conclusion, referring to the clause promising Mulud and his followers modern weapons and ammunition.

"They have been delivered, Captain."

"What are they?"

"Sixty Gras rifles, '74 models. Twenty Lebel carbines. Forty thousand cartridges."

"Ah—" Martel reclined in his canvas chair, mused a moment. "Do you know what you're going to do, Deland? You're going to write Mulud ben Brahim a letter which I shall translate for you, asking him to send the weapons and the ammunition back here. You'll hand it to that fellow the next time he comes."

"Clause five of the pact refers to the rifles," Deland protested. "There is no stipulation that they are to be sent back for any reason."

"I wish to test his loyalty. If he sends back the guns on a mere request, he's

playing a straight game and he has not been tempted to use them against us. You can tell him it's to inspect them."

"I'll obey," Deland said, "but it's almost an insult. You know, far better than I, Captain, that the desert man is always cleaning and oiling his rifle."

"As long as you obey—" Martel waved his hand lightly— "I do not ask for your understanding or approval."

So the letter was duly written, translated and sent. The rifles and cartridges were in the redoubt three hours later, brought by Mulud's own men.

Men were set to work taking them apart, checking the serial numbers against the list kept by the French, ascertaining that no substitution had been made. The cases of cartridges were broken open, packages ripped, three samples taken from each box. Everything was in good condition. Deland personally oversaw the work. When it was concluded he reported to Martel in his quarters.

"The guns are assembled and ready to be turned back to their owners, Captain."

"You presume upon my patience," Martel said placidly. "I do not intend to send the guns back immediately. If the bunch of slobs that brought them is still here, dismiss them."

"That is an order, Captain?"

"A formal order, a most formal order," Martel assured him, smiling. "Furthermore, request Mulud ben Brahim to send over all the supplies we have given him. Including sacks of flour, coffee, canned goods and so forth. Have him take down the French flag he flies over his *kasbah*."

"That is madness!" Deland shouted angrily.

"And you are impertinent," Martel pointed out.

Again the letter was sent, and again Mulud obeyed. Deland began to wonder whether he was not the victim of a nightmare.

On the sixth day the captain broke out afresh.

"Send word to Mulud ben Brahim, Deland, that he will have to limit the drawing of water from the oasis' wells to two quarts a day per person, man, woman or child—and the least possible amount for the animals."

Deland composed the letter in French, Martel translated it into Arabic and at the bottom Deland placed his signature. He had realized the uselessness of protest. Nevertheless, he could not refrain at the last moment.

"Rather nervy, Captain. Those wells are his own, and we are not masters here, merely tolerated."

"You're an ass," Martel replied, peaceful as ever.

Deland swallowed the insult. One does not rashly risk a conflict with a superior when there are no witnesses.

This time Mulud rebelled, stating, in firm words, that the French were not masters in the region. That which was their's was returned but his own and his people's property would not be subject to control.

DELAND was certain now that his new chief was insane. Martel had been for months at a stretch without contact with his own race. The sun, hot enough to cook an egg upon the sand, could easily addle a man's brain. It was not unprecedented for a European to go mad in the Sahara.

He spoke to Stazewski.

"You're not responsible," Stazewski declared. "I've heard him give you some of those orders. When hell starts, speak your piece, and in the meanwhile take a couple of drinks. First rule in the army, remember: One should not try to understand."

"I'm going to report this to headquarters."

"Do what you like," Stazewski shrugged. "You're not a minor."

The courier from Hassi-Mazzer arrived at the end of the week. Martel received the official correspondence, read it, and did not offer to show a line to Deland. Deland knew the native runner, Ben Shloki. He wrote a letter to Captain Fangeas, a personal friend, relating the

strange behavior of Martel at the redoubt. Luckily, he asked Ben Shloki to conceal the letter. Before the courier's departure Martel went through the contents of the bag, sorting the envelopes. This before Deland and a scribe in the office.

"All right," he concluded, "no personal mail this trip. Deland, if you wish to hold your own letters, take them." Martel tossed the envelopes aside, then initialed several sheets of reports that he had dictated to the scribe.

The courier left. Deland felt more at ease. If Fangeas found that Martel was acting according to a plan arranged by de Castex, he would burn the letter. If not, something would be done to end the activities so radically opposed to the instructions received.

Mulud ben Brahim made no further efforts to communicate with the French outpost. The native population was hostile, as evidenced by the small boys who came near the redoubt to shout insults instead of to beg for bread and money.

The men grew restless, sullen. Two deserted, vanished in the direction of the north. They did not go far. Their bodies were found by a searching party, mutilated. Raiders or some of the inhabitants of Ain-el-Gara?

ON THE thirteenth day of Martel's command the final quarrel started. Stazewski, half drunk, seemed dimly aware of the growing tension between the two men. He was more noisy than usual, drank deep and told endless stories which started in one spot of the globe and spraddled over three continents.

Each time Deland glanced up from his plate he would find Martel's eyes upon him. Soon it became apparent that the captain was seeking some way to offend him. Resolved to bear things patiently, his anger, nevertheless, mounted.

"You are not satisfied with me, Captain?" he said at last, when he could control himself no longer.

"No, I'm not," Martel admitted. "You have the instincts of a rebel. You will end badly if you conflict with your superiors. You have questioned my orders on occasion, requested explanations. I have charge of political affairs here. Under pretext that you do not understand what I am about, you presume to judge."

"In the near future, Captain," Deland said, calmly, "you will discover I have done even more."

"What have you done?" Martel lifted the corners of his lips mockingly.

"I gave Ben Shloki a letter for Captain Fangeas, reporting your actions."

Martel's face whitened perceptibly, though his expression did not alter.

"That was disloyal, Lieutenant."

"Justified by my suspicions."

"What suspicions?"

"That—forgive me, Captain, but I must say it—that you are not yourself. It was my duty to share my fear with some one else. I believe it would come better under the term of initiative."

"There is an uglier name for it, Lieutenant."

"Which doesn't matter." Deland shrugged and laughed harshly.

Martel had been playing with the stem of a wine glass. Bruskly his hand shot forward. Deland rose, staggered, startled and half blinded by the impact of the liquid against his face. He shook his head, wiped his eyes and was about to circle the table when Stazewski threw his arms around his waist and dragged him back. The sub-lieutenant had forgotten his rank, his knowledge of French, in the excitement and stammered warnings in broken words.

"Stazewski is right," Martel said. He had not risen. "In this place I am your captain. My person is presumably sacred."

"I demand satisfaction!"

"There is one way of obtaining it, certain formalities through which you'll have to go. You'll leave tomorrow, go to Hassi-Mazzer, and ask permission from Colonel de Castex to meet me on the field. I shall be at your disposal. I withdraw neither the accusation that you

did a sneaky thing in going over my head nor the casting of the wine in your face. When we are both free from duty I shall be glad to receive your seconds."

Stazewski released Deland and filled the glasses again.

"This is all nonsense," he said gruffly. "You two are going to forget it and click glasses." He added in a whisper to Deland. "Up goes your commission if you fight a captain. He isn't worth it. Get a grip on yourself."

"You don't understand, Stazewski," Deland said, impatiently.

"Lieutenant Deland is right," Martel said. "You do not understand. Better let bad enough alone, Stazewski."

"I was broken twice," Stazewski insisted. "I know how it feels. Don't do it, little one, don't do it."

Then, Deland saw a scene that puzzled him. Martel rose, circled the table and laid his hand on the ranker's shoulder. His eyes met those of the Legionaire.

"You're a good man," he said, quietly, "a damned good man. I'll promise you one thing: if Deland calls me to account no harm shall come to him from his superiors; his career will not be broken. There are ways of keeping things quiet. Go away, friend, and don't worry."

Stazewski stared at Martel. The excitement had sobered him. His hands quivered.

"Good night," he said politely, and left.

Martel turned to Deland, looked upon him without resentment.

"What I said to the honest fellow need not be construed as an apology to you. I had to quiet him. You will leave tomorrow morning with one of the native camelmen stationed in the post. Or two, if you need an escort. You doubt my wisdom in most things, but believe this: The path between here and Hassi-Mazzer is clear of all raiders. You can go safely."

Deland bowed slightly.

"If you can travel with one man, so can I. Have you any letter for Colonel de Castex?"

"I have not," Martel replied. "But would you be so kind as to give him a verbal message of a more personal nature, which he will understand."

"Willingly," Deland agreed. Martel did not move, seemed not to have heard, so Deland repeated, "Willingly."

"Tell Colonel de Castex that the Eden Palace is a good place for a man to forget his troubles."

CHAPTER III

EL RHEZIM—THE LEAD ROPE

KHEBBA BEN KHELLAF'S visit to Hassi-Mazzer and the Eden Palace six years before had a purpose other than curiosity. He had fought against organized troops in the East and knew the value of trained soldiers. He hoped to find among the several hundred natives one dissatisfied man who would come with him. He met Louis Chalabre in Mezzian's Cafe and knew that Allah had granted him his wish.

Chalabre became a true Moslem, professing without hypocrisy the rules of Mohammed. He easily blended with the background of blood and steel that made up Khebba ben Khellaf's early campaigns.

Returning a grown man among people he had left as a child, Khebba had prestige to earn. The Ouled el Seif, the Sons of the Sword, tall, gaunt, fierce riders, were indeed the tools for a conqueror. Chalabre thought that when he first saw them, with their ragged clothing, their glowering glances, their skinny limbs on which muscles and sinews stood out like corded steel. They were armed with solid blades, held in brass handles, and obsolete flintlocks.

Repeating rifles were necessary if they were to cope on an equal footing with the local tribesmen. Repeating rifles cost eighty to one hundred dollars in silver. A *jich*—small raiding band—from the Ait-Khebbash, supplied the first weapons. It was a neat little combat skilfully directed by Chalabre. At the finish, the Ait Khebbashes had lost interest in the

ownership of arms and twelve of the Ouled el Seif possessed good carbines and fifty rounds of ammunition a piece.

During the campaign to procure armament the band under Khebba lived like the crew of an old pirate ship, not always sure of food and shelter, sometimes forced to seek for days a haven of refuge and rest. Once a forced retreat, pursued by the victorious enemy, had tested endurance and courage. At length Khebba found himself at the head of sixty-five well armed men. The others had paid with their lives for their comrades' weapons.

Khebba ben Khellaf decided to approach his mother's tribe and claim leadership. They were the Ait-Taznak, living near the arid bed of the Draa. The Kaid, then in power, was a dignified old man of fifty, Ayal uld Luhalani. He listened to Khebba's envoys quietly, made a movement with one hand and two of the three were beheaded. The third was treated with comparative humanity, merely losing an eye and the fingers and thumb of the right hand. There was a reason for this mercy. He was to carry a negative answer, together with the heads of the others, to Khebba ben Khellaf.

The avenging stroke swooped upon Ayal uld Luhalani like a thunder bolt. The Sons of the Sword materialized from the dusty horizon, phantoms in brown and blue rags, bearded, copper hued faces contracted into masks of fury. At their head rode two good looking horsemen clad in white wool. One seemed to direct the attack by words and gesture, the other galloped serenely among the bullets and against the steel. The man who shouted was Chalabre. The calm man was Khebba ben Khellaf, who possessed the *baraka*—divine protection against harm. He feared no man and trusted in the will of Allah to preserve him.

Chalabre was charitable. Finding Ayal uld Luhalani dismounted and wounded he did not dash aside the blade held in the weakened grip. Raising his pistol, he smiled, and was answered by a smile. He pressed the trigger and Ayal was spared further hours of life under the attention of Khebba's followers.

Many others gained Paradise that morning, leaving many widows. The Ouled el Seif, dwindled in murder, were there, nevertheless, to take their places. Khebba was accepted, became master over a happy people. An interval of peace followed, employed by Chalabre, who had become known as El Rhazim, in organizing the warriors of the tribe, welding them with the Ouled el Seif.

And the epic conquest was resumed. Khebba selected two white bearded relatives of his mother as advisers and played the game of alliances. Men dissatisfied with their lot, fugitives from vengeance or family feuds, came to his tents. They had but to declare themselves willing to fight and they were accepted, thus forming, in the core of the Occidental Sahara, an alien Legion.

Later, entire groups, bringing women and children, joined Khebba. The Ouled Tidrah, who for centuries had obeyed their conquerors, the Ouled Delim—a proud despotic race despite their name which means the Sons of the Louse—sent their fighting men as a matter of tradition to fight in the ranks of the Ouled Delim, though they hated them. Khebba promised loot and modern weapons and other chieftains joined, swelling by four hundred warriors the already numerous ranks.

Then a clan feud among the Ouled Rekabats sent fifty families north to join Khebba. Young men of the Ouled Tahya came to make their fortune and their name in good company, where opportunity was equal for all. Khebba fell in with Chalabre's democratic plans, disregarded minor questions of religion that exist within the bosom of Islam.

"IT IS well done, thank Allah," Khebba said one day. "There is no more to do in the region. Tomorrow we march north. If we are indeed strong we must be masters."

A powerful army marched north,

equipped with machine guns smuggled in from Rio di Oro. The tribes hastily forgot their quarrels, confederated and fought, desert men against desert men, with one band led by one who knew the desert and another who had been trained in the best military school in Europe. The battle lasted an hour, the massacre three times longer. Evening found Chalabre master of a field littered with hundreds of nude corpses.

A year after the return of the victorious *harka* to its home grounds, an emissary came down from Morocco, sent by El Hibba, pretender to the Sultanate and foe of France. He offered good terms for an alliance, mastery over part of the Sunset Empire, after Mulay Hafid the Scurvy Sultan and the Christian invaders had been tossed back into the sea.

"It is in a fashion war against the infidel," Khebba said to Chalabre," and it would be more to be second in Morocco than first here."

"Then I shall not go," Chalabre declared, "for your men will fight the French. Moreover, El Hibba will see in thee a possible rival. So long as he has need of thee, thou shalt be his loved brother, his own flesh, the blood of his veins. Later he will treat thee as the sultan treated the *rogui*, cage thee for the amusement of the mob and slaughter thee with small cuts."

"Thou dost forget," Khebba ben Khellaf pointed out, "that Allah laid his finger on my forehead at birth, that I have the *baraka* and no harm may come to me."

Khebba ben Khellaf rubbed his long, slender fingers in his short beard, nodded.

"Nevertheless, for thy sake I withhold my alliance."

THUS, El Hibba went forth to meet the French columns without Khebba and El Rhezim and was defeated, as all men have learned. Defeated in spite of his many warriors, defeated in spite of the blue horde from the mountains. Defeated, possibly, because at the critical moment there were no Ouled el Seif to whirl down and hew a path for the lesser warriors to follow.

Khebba ben Khellaf turned his attention to less martial work. He built for himself, on a hillock overlooking a gully through which the waters rushed after cloudbursts, a stony place, rearing many square towers into the sky. In this Chalabre assisted him. Dates from the oases, dotting the course of the river bed, were sent in caravans to Tafilalet, thence to the markets in Europe.

To this citadel came, one day, a deserter from the Foreign Legion. He had escaped massacre a dozen times, he himself did not quite know how. Reduced to the ranks for indiscipline and drunkenness he had taken flight, passing through Figuig, Tafilalet, turned back from the Atlas passes when he sought to gain Morocco, wandering like a piece of straw in a mill stream until he caught sight of Khebba ben Khellaf's *kasbah*.

The Legionaire had been supply sergeant at Hassi-Mazzer at the time of Chalabre's escape.

"Colonel de Castex knew you had escaped toward the south," he told Chalabre, "and most of the officers knew it. A boy brought your *képi* back, saying you had gone off with a stranger. Officially, your fate was unknown. There was a current rumor among the troops that you had been done away with to avoid the spilling of the beans. Another, that you had gone north, disguised, and reached Oran. They held the court martial in Paris after you had been gone six months. You were condemned, by default. Three years' fortress. Then the press said that you were being protected by the army clique. The colonel was transfered, was nearly tried himself. It was an unholy mess. Finally, the papers published a note from the secret service, signed by the chief, stating that your passage in Oran, Marseilles, Barcelona had been ascertained. From Barcelona, you took an Italian steamer to Rio under an *alias*, and the last trace found you work-

ing in the rubber fields! I believed it, didn't think they'd lie like that, being government officials and all."

"My friend," Chalabre replied, "a secret service is presumed to know things. When it doesn't, it has no reason for being. They were asked a question and they answered it. Don't blame them. You seek shelter here. First you must become a Moslem."

"That's done," the Legionaire said, with a wry grimace. "I was converted in Figuig, by an old *marabout* who sheltered me from searching parties. It saved the rest of my hide and pleased him, so what could I do?"

"If you'll give me your word not to mention my presence here," Chalabre went on, "I'll see that you are taken from the coast to the Canary Islands. From there you can get to Europe and home."

"I don't want to. I can be happier here." The deserter winked. "Women, food, and if you know how you can even get some decent stuff to drink." He rubbed his chest and made a comical face. "Not alcohol at all, but medicine, medicine— Chief, you can kid them like hell, get around all their laws."

"What can you do, besides that?"

"I've been a carpenter, I've been a mason. I've worked in steel and I can play the mandolin."

"We can use you. I'll give you two women, a house and a decent amount of booze. At the end of each month, forty francs. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said the deserter. "Have that contract printed, post it in Bel Abbes and you'll have more Legionaires than the government."

Halbwachs, the deserter, was worthy of his hire. Clad in native garments, contentedly smoking a pipe, he directed others to work, taught the natives the elements of his trade. At night Chalabre often visited him, eager to speak French. They sat on the veranda overlooking the patio, watched the two wives playing under the trees, while the mandolin tinkled. When Halbwachs became the father of two sons his happiness was complete.

"Somewhat better than promenading a knapsack over the *bled*," he said, "or even trying to get steady work in Europe with your stomach ringing mealtime all day long."

Khebba was satisfied with his two Europeans. They lived a moral life, and sank prostrate in prayer at the right times of day. He asked Chalabre whether other Europeans could be procured.

"An evil thought," Chalabre replied. "Too many would soon turn against you. Group Europeans together and they want to be master."

"But thou—"

"I am of this land, born and bred. Halbwachs is placid. Do not judge by us."

KHEBBA said no more at the time. But when Barthez arrived, he greeted him cordially. Barthez had been a captain in the Spanish army. A first scandal at home, women and gambling, had sent him into virtual exile. He added a little trading to swell his small pay, went too far, grafted, was caught. Escaped from prison before time for his trial, he fled due east, spent a year with the Ouled Rekabats and embraced Islam. Tired of monotony, he had left the tents of his hosts and offered his services to Khebba ben Khellaf. In appearance he was a small, stocky man with a dark face. His native name was El Kassir.

Chalabre took an instant dislike to him, a dislike which grew when the Spaniard, considering him as a comrade, made virulent attacks upon France and Frenchmen. Before long Barthez grew aware of Chalabre's dislike and set to work to diminish his influence with Khebba.

Khebba was not a superman. His enormous success had not left his head wholly steady. The part which Chalabre had played was almost forgotten. The Spaniard's flattery pleased him. He soon sought Barthez's companionship in preference to that of Chalabre, who spoke

the truth, regardless of its effect upon Khebba's vanity.

Barthez, who did not add cowardice to his many faults, immediately asked for service in the field and piloted raiding bands with success. From one fifth to a third of the loot was his by right. Chalabre discovered that he had arranged to turn his winnings into cash, through a Moorish trader in a Moroccan city. Passing through several hands this money would finally be banked in South America in Barthez's name. He lost a good half in various commissions to bankers who knew his plight. Nevertheless, his savings were enormous.

Khebba, who knew of this, shrugged. "What is his is his—and, when he is ready to go, who knows but Allah will strike him—by my hand?"

Barthez soon dreamed gigantic plans that would make Khebba master from Timbuktu to the Mediterranean. The Berber listened without displeasure. Despite his desert wisdom, he did not conceive the might of European nations. The occasional successes won by natives against the French, the crushing of Spanish armies in the Moroccan Riff, proved that Europeans were not invulnerable. And it was a vision sufficient to lure any man—the triumphal entrance into Algiers with only the blue sea between himself and the old powers.

For years Chalabre had prevented Khebba ben Khellaf from turning against the French. He told him that although first successes were possible, in the end failure was inevitable. If the Nineteenth Army Corps stationed in North Africa was not sufficient—and it counted among its units the two regiments of the Foreign Legion, the Zouaves and the Tirailleurs—troops from France would arrive. Some way would be found, under pressure of emergency, to bring field guns in great number down into the sands. Besides the number of worthless old gentlemen in charge there were a few able to command. Joffre, who had taken Timbuktu; Gouraud, who had captured Samory and crushed Mauritanian rebels; Mangin, who had pacified the Marakesh hinterland. They would have behind them the terrific push of organized treasury, industry, and the tradition of victory.

Chalabre had kept a sincere love for his country. He blamed individuals, not the nation, for the injustice shown him. He was a fugitive but not a traitor.

Halbwachs, to whom he told his fears, had an obvious solution. Chalabre argued long with him to prevent him from taking his rifle, lying in ambush on a convenient terrace and ending the Spaniard's earthly activities with a single shot. Chalabre drew back before the thought of assassination. Over Barthez, civilization, which had no place in the desert, cast a mantle of protection.

LESS and less did Khebba summon Chalabre for conferences. Often he would send him on long trips to quiet one sector or another, which, annoyed by taxation—another idea of Barthez's—was threatening rebellion. Chalabre was informed by Halbwachs that during his absence Barthez and Khebba received delegates from numerous tribes, some from as far north as the Middle Atlas, others from the Mauritanian Adrar.

Khebba's main appeal to the populations of the desert had been organized freedom, independence of the individual. Those thrown overboard, the ship was in danger. Chalabre returned from an expedition to enforce ideas which he could not assert were honest, with the very firm belief that Khebba's reign would draw to a close unless he changed his methods.

He decided to have a frank talk with Khebba, at his own risk. The Berber was by then so bloated with conceit that he started violently at criticism as if from a twinge of physical pain. Moreover, the presence of El Rhezim within his palace reminded every one that he had not accomplished his victories alone, that the crafty moves, the most telling strokes had been thought of and executed by his *khalif*.

Khebba anticipated that conference. Scarcely had Chalabre returned to his estate when a messenger was announced. He proved to be one of the thirty-two survivors of the original band. Twice Chalabre had saved his life and twice Bokhari had thrown himself before his chief's body, for which he had earned Chalabre's esteem and two scars.

"I am dusty from travel; I have scarcely drawn breath in two weeks," Chalabre replied to the message that he should come immediately. "I shall come later."

"I can but repeat his exact words," Bokhari said with a strange expression of embarrassment and anger. "I know it is not well to address thee thus."

"One moment," Chalabre agreed, "and I'll follow thee. Doubtless there is something of great importance."

He changed his garments, gave orders to his servants and proceeded leisurely. He passed two daggers, well in evidence, through his belt. In a pocket sewn in one of the wide sleeves of his *gandoura*, he placed a small Belgian automatic. His mistrust of Khebba ben Khellaf had thus grown in the past months. He was aware also that Barthez would like nothing better than to empty a revolver into his predecessor's stomach.

He found Barthez at Khebba's side. The Berber was seated on a fashion of throne at the end of a long gallery opening through wide arches on a beautiful garden. Two of his men stood behind him, naked blades in fists. A shrunken, comical old chap, the jester, was capering and chuckling nearby. A colossal negro applied a fly chaser of ostrich feathers over the emir's head.

Chalabre could not restrain a faint smile. This was the man he had met at Hassi-Mazzer, gaunt of belly and fiery of soul. His stomach bulged the folds of the purple velvet sash. The face had coarsened. Under the eyes were deep, dark pockets. The pleasures of the flesh had tempted Khebba and temptation had won. Place a dress suit on his body, a black hat on his head and he was the twin brother of a certain banker of Near-Eastern extraction whom Chalabre had seen during a leave in Paris.

THE MAN who had announced him fell on his hands and knees before "the presence". Chalabre wondered, with another smile, whether he were expected to do likewise.

"Matters have ended well," Khebba said, "for thou dost smile."

"So well indeed, Khebba ben Khellaf, that two more successes and thou'lt be fleeing for thy life," Chalabre said calmly.

The fly chaser hesitated in its sweep. Behind the emir's shoulder the black grinned from ear to ear. The Sons of the Sword, brought west for a far different purpose, looked bored. As for Barthez, he showed a properly horrified smirk.

"Thou hast thus spoken often," Khebba ben Khellaf said, "and four times twice thy prediction failed. I have other things to speak of."

Chalabre picked up one of the huge leather cushions scattered on the rugs, tossed it beside Khebba's seat, climbed the steps and sank down.

"I'm weary. In the saddle long. Let us talk at ease."

There was a pause, an instant of suspense. Chalabre's hand, hidden in the sleeve, found the metallic cold of the automatic. Khebba's hand lifted, but it was to rub his glistening skull, shaven to leave the single tuft of hair by which the Angel of Death was to grasp him when he died, presumedly to enter the Seventh Heaven and the realm of the perfect *houris*.

"*Ya*, El Rhezim," he said, "there may be wisdom in thy words. But if my people stir uneasily it is not because of the taxes. They know that taxes are due to those who are sent by Allah to guide them. But they have not been called to fight for a long while. There is little loot in the land. I shall end all that soon. Dost know that those whom thou lovest so much, those of thy race who caused thee to flee, had made plans against me?"

"They must heed thy presence," Chalabre pointed out. "Art thou of so little importance that they can ignore thy existence and make no preparations?"

"There is talk of a column to be sent against me from Morocco, made up of the sultan's fighters, but led by French officers."

"If they attack thee I no longer ask thy leniency towards them. I shall not fight them but will no longer advise inaction. This much shall I tell thee, even. Wait but a few days' journey north of here, meet them after their long trip when their water has run low in the skins and thy men are well watered, fed and rested. It will then be easy to disperse them."

"There is yet more news," Khebba went on. "Some one was here during thy absence, delegates from the powerful Tekna Moors, whom I had convoked for a conference. Among them was Khir Allah u Ahmed el Habib uld Ali m'Barek, and—" Khebba listed a dozen names as complicated as the first, hoping thus to show their importance.

"The Tekna are led by wise men who love trade more than war," Chalabre advised. "They will not fight the French now."

"Thou art right to some extent," Khebba admitted. "They have been promised many things by a certain French officer—" He turned to Barthez. "Speakest thou the man's name, El Kassir."

"Captain Martel, of the Native Bureaux."

"That is the name." Khebba agreed. "He is a most clever man. Thus far, the Tekna are neither against us nor against the French. In the near future they must decide. And Captain Martel has left Morocco, had been assigned to Ain-el-Gara. Thou dost know of the place and who is it's Kaid?"

"Mulud ben Brahim, yes."

"Mulud is the ally of the French," Khebba went on. "He has even permitted them to erect a small *kasbah* near his place. Now, Mulud ben Brahim is a descendant of the same ancestor that gave the Tekna their power in the long spent past. There is a belief among the Tekna that in him lives more than a spark of the wisdom of that first great man. The Tekna will not fight for the French in any case, they promised. But out of regard for Mulud, their ally, they may permit the French columns to pass through their territory. That would mean one more point of attack against us, added to the Aaoura path from Morocco and the path from Hassi-Mazzer. I could not cope with three armies at once. Is my reasoning right?"

"It is," Chalabre admitted.

"My hand is forced. We must gain control of Ain-el-Gara before it becomes the base of a powerful *harka* of the Christians. In the meanwhile, as we know that Captain Martel travels with but one guide, a group of our men, led by two Sons of the Sword, will await him south of Hassi-Mazzer and kill him.

Khebba ben Khellaf lifted his hand to still Chalabre's instinctive gesture of protest.

"I love thee as a brother, El Rhezim, and I do not ask thee to spill the blood of thy kindred. But seest thou, what recourse there is for me save fighting?"

Chalabre twisted his fingers nervously. Arguments were shaping in his brain, words to point out the weakness of Khebba's reasoning.

"To control Ain-el-Gara we must slay the defenders. Mulud ben Brahim will be slain with the rest, for he is a worthy man and shall not be found among his women when the lead flies thickest. Thereupon, the Tekna, who love him, thou hast said thyself, the Tekna will be angry. And there is the little fort with the Legionaires. They will kill many of our men and take the courage from the bellies of those that remain."

"I can not wait here for their blow, like a sheep waiting for the knife," Khebba argued.

Chalabre knew that a united onslaught at this time, with Southern Morocco seething on the verge of rebellion and the Riffs active against Spain in the north,

would endanger the French. Particularly an attack launched by Khebba ben Khellaf and Sherf Mulay Mustefa of Tafilalet.

"If Mulud ben Brahim broke his pact with the Christians," Chalabre resumed, "they would fear the eight hundred riflemen of his kinsmen, the Tekna, they would hesitate and they might delay their action for years."

"That is so, El Rhezim," Barthez spoke directly to Chalabre for the first time, "but Mulud ben Brahim has no reason to break his word."

"There might be a way—" Chalabre was thinking desperately.

By casting a shadow on French prestige, strangely enough, he might save thousands of lives and millions of money, delay the clash, perhaps persuade Khebba ben Khellaf to make a pact. He believed he saw a way to compromise between loyalty to his new people and to France.

"You say that Captain Martel has left Morocco and been assigned to Ain-el-Gara. A group of men is to await him south of Hassi-Mazzer and kill him. Why slay him?"

"Why not slay him?" Khebba asked.

"Capture him and bring him here. He can be sent back later. Thus you save angering the French. I shall wait at a given spot, await his baggage within two days' journey of the redoubt. I shall wear his garments, present myself at the redoubt as Captain Martel—"

"And then?" Khebba ben Khellaf questioned, leaning forward eagerly.

"I shall so anger Mulud ben Brahim that he will break the pact. Give me a fortnight to accomplish this, then follow with a few men for escort, visit Mulud ben Brahim as a friend and obtain his promise to be on our side."

"Are you known of any one at the redoubt?" Barthez put in.

"While escorting a caravan northward a year ago I encountered the detachment of the Legion moving down to El Tess. In my *burnous* with a *litham* veiling my face I stared curiously at the soldiers as they passed by, thinking I might see a familiar face. I recognized no one. During a sojourn in Marakesh I purchased an official booklet in which were listed the army assignments in the colonies. As you know, I keep informed of the changes. It is unlikely that either Lieutenant Deland or Sub-lieutenant Stazewski, I believe, knew Martel. In the past few years the captain has been out of the territory occupied by the French. There's little chance of discovery."

"And Mulud ben Brahim?"

"He knows my face, therefore I will avoid him. The pact will be broken, I promise thee. Thus thou wilt save many good warriors, thy prestige and perhaps thy head. With control of Ain-el-Gara the French must perforce respect thee. They will be glad to sign a treaty guaranteeing the autonomy of thy people. Avoid bloodshed at all costs. There is much outcry in Paris when money is asked for columns but once French blood is shed the honor of the land is at stake and the money is quickly given."

Khebba ben Khellaf seemed impressed. Little did he care for the lives of his followers, but the humor of the adventure appealed to him. The officers of France in the intelligence service were seldom bested in finesse. Whoever tricked them would win applause. Chalabre pressed this advantage.

"Men will see that brave as a lion as thou art thou canst also show the suppleness and resourcefulness of the panther. Years after, when men gather to talk, the tale of Ain-el-Gara and the trick thou didst play will be told. And when you have signed with the French you can make your own terms, rule your own people as you will."

Khebba's heavy face lightened with a smile.

He turned to Barthez.

"El Kassir, as Allah hears thee, could that be done?"

Barthez hesitated. Then he admitted the plan might succeed. Fortunately, he added, Martel had blue eyes much like those of Chalabre, El Rhezim.

CHAPTER IV

TWENTY TO ONE—WE ARE FRENCH—ODDS ARE EVEN

CHALABRE in the redoubt had planned a final stroke against Mulud ben Brahim's tottering loyalty to his allies.

He sent an orderly to summon Stazewski.

"Old man," he said pleasantly," we may have to move from one day to another. Have everything ready. Understood?"

"Everything's always ready." Stazewski said, loyally. "Lieutenant Deland kept it so, Captain!"

"Fine. I want you to tie up those guns taken from Mulud into bundles to be carried on mules' backs. Also the cartridges. Have we any dynamite here?"

"We have a stock of petards, such as are used to blow up walls and such stuff. Part of the stock of all detachments. Flying columns can get them here if needed to break into a *kasbah*."

"All right. You know how to handle them?"

Stazewski laughed.

"I got the Military Medal for placing two of them under fire against a Chinese blockhouse, Captain. I was a sergeant and chosen for the purpose by my battalion commander who had many noncoms to pick from."

"That makes you an expert. You know the lay of this redoubt. Select your spots and make everything ready to place the petards, so that after the detachment moves out when I give the word, it'll blow up and leave nothing."

"The devil!" Stazewski's jaw fell in astonishment. "We've hardly finished patching up the walls, Captain?" Then he added hastily, "But orders are orders, Captain. They'll be placed there tonight."

When Mulud ben Brahim heard the explosion, saw the place occupied by the French troops going up into the sky, saw the troops moving away with arms and baggage he would realize that he had been abandoned. Then Khebba ben Khellaf would appear. The opportunity to gain a strong friend when his former friends were leaving the region, could not go unheeded.

Stazewski came back, announced that the men were at work and showed on a plan of the redoubt the places where the petards would be laid. Chalabre nodded with satisfaction, admired the choice of emplacements and went out to make other preparations for departure. There were within El Tess, as usual, a half dozen camelmen in charge of a score of animals. These reserve beasts were to carry additional supplies on a very long march or serve as reserve for the columns that might operate in the region, using El Tess as a base.

One of their number had left with Deland. Chalabre gave the others instructions to fill water skins and prepare to follow the detachment on a march of long duration.

He was not in a hurry and yet there was no time to waste. The letter to Fangeas did not worry him overmuch. Fangeas was a skeptic—and cautious. He would inform de Castex. The two would confer. Captain Martel had a solid reputation. Compared with him, Deland did not count. Before sending down a man to investigate, de Castex would write a letter to Martel asking him for an explanation. There would be a strong suspicion that Deland was not himself. Life in the *bled* was known to affect the mind of a young chap. Martel, inured to the existence, would be less likely to go amuck. Probably the request for details was even at that moment on the way south.

As for Deland, both he and his guide had started off with poor mounts. It would take him four days to reach Hassi-Mazzer, a day for de Castex to organize a detachment, four days to reach the redoubt.

As soon as darkness closed down, Chalabre sent the orderly for a lantern. He removed the plain glass slides, replaced them with oblong plates red in color. Then, under the eyes of the astonished private, he picked up scissors,

trimmed the wick, adjusted it to his convenience.

"Come along," he ordered.

He climbed to the booth of the mirador and lighted the lantern. A long bamboo pole was procured, fastened in place, lashed securely by the orderly. The redoubt was dominated by that spot of light, scintillating like an enormous ruby star against the sky. Legionaires gathered below speculated loudly upon the purpose of the improvised beacon.

Chalabre found Stanzewski at the foot of the ladder.

"What's that for, Captain?"

"That's a signal."

"Ah!" Stazewski walked beside the man he knew as Martel in silence. Then he laughed. "I see! You had already agreed with Mulud on all this, and that's to let him know we're going to blow the place to hell!"

"Exactly," Chalabre agreed. "How did you guess?"

"Easy. There's no one else within sight."

Chalabre smiled.

Sons of the Sword were already in the saddle and off to warn Khebba ben Khellaf, who must be within a day's journey, that the stage was set for his arrival.

HOURS had passed since Deland had left the redoubt at dawn. Wind was blowing from the southwest, hot, searing, whipping the thin sand into whirling wisps that stung the face even through the veil. Ahead the back of the guide swayed monotonously like a pendulum. Ben Ishak was a dour, mute fellow, a Doui-Menian who had fought the French in the past and served them now grudgingly at so much silver per month. During the noon halt he silently prepared a frugal meal of tinned beef and dried dates. When he was forced to speak he dropped the words like stones into a well.

Deland was alone with his thoughts, an uneasy mental poring over the events at the redoubt.

"I'll be damned," he muttered, "if I'm not beginning to believe he acted under orders. The man is so cocksure of himself. And if he's insane, his eyes don't show it. The worst of it is, even now, I can't hate him. I've got to go through with this mess, make a show of a duel. I trust that Stazewski will not feel impelled to take up my cause, and try, in his elephantine way, to mend matters. It would be too bad if he got himself into a mess and was reduced a third time. He's due for a pension in a couple of years. He can live on that, while if retired as a private he could never make the grade again at his age. He would become just an old bum, pounding the roads of France. God! One never knows how far one's actions will affect others. I suppose I worry needlessly about Stazewski."

He shrugged, rested his hands on the crosspiece of the saddle, stretched his legs stiffly and envied not the officers of the Meharistes who depend on gigantic hump backed sheep for transportation.

An unpleasant interview awaited him when he met de Castex and informed him that the man he held in highest esteem was a maniac. And the idea of a duel! Encounters between officers always meant scandal. Yet, in spite of regulations, an officer was honor bound to fight if insulted. That was the penalty and the privilege of those who elected to wear a tin sword at their left side.

"Martel seemed always to have something in the back of his head," he ruminated. "Once I swear I saw pity in his eyes—compassion. Now what position do I find myself in, reasoning calmly? Martel is making a deliberate attempt to antagonize Mulud ben Brahim. My instructions were to spare the old chap's feelings. Here is a problem in fine, close, military etiquette: Does the direct order of Martel free me from those I received from officers placed above him? It does. That's regulation. Direct orders from an immediate superior who brings credentials of later date than written orders from those higher up, are to be obeyed. Unquestioningly.

"Ah, that's true—but—what about that initiative dinned into our heads at the Academy, but which, if assumed wrongly, suddenly shifts to disobedience. I could have acted against Martel. The men hate him worse than arsenic. Stazewski would have taken the chance that I was right. I would have had to catch him by surprise, overpower him before he could reach his revolver. Overpower him? Overpower a gorilla. I saw him stripped to the waist. When he turned his wrist, his shoulders rippled. By the way, a sword held by his right hand—

"After he threw that wine in my face, I sincerely meant to grapple with him. Luckily Stazewski grabbed me—both for discipline and the sake of my precious carcass. Quite likely to snap a bone or two before he realized. Charming fellow . . .

"Having established that it would have been unwise to bring things to a physical plane, what could I have done? Nothing. He is rather a damper on initiative, that chap. Nothing else to do save retire in good order as I am doing, following the good ben Ishak and hoping for the best. Yes, Colonel, I am Lieutenant Deland. I merely wish to inform you that you are crazy, that your staff is crazy, that everybody is crazy including Captain Martel. Who is sane? Modest whisper. I am. What I wish to do? I wish to spit Captain Martel or be spit by him. We did not agree very well, you understand, I being sane and he crazy."

Deland laughed aloud. Ben Ishak turned and stared reprovingly. Was it fit that a lieutenant of the French should be laughing all alone, thus loudly? The guide's lips moved swiftly, doubtlessly reciting the verses of El Ferak, the verses of the Koran which drive away the evil spirits that roam about to steal the good sense of desert travelers.

Ben Ishak's voice rose in vigorous chant. Camels travel best to singing, having a strong appreciation for rhythm.

"*Ya—ya!* The harvest of the blades is blood. Praise Allah that it may be rich. The harvest of the moon is love."

The listless heads at the ends of long necks lifted alertly, nostrils seemed to inhale the warm air, the cloven lips bulged convulsively and the split hoofs dug into the sand.

Brief twilight, then night. Ben Ishak haltered the camels, lighted his fire of dry roots, brewed coffee for the officer, tea for himself. He ripped the top from a pyramidal can of corned beef. The plates scoured in sand, he lighted his pipe and smoked in silence, his black eyes peering at Deland intently.

"Art thou leaving the *bled* for good?" he asked unexpectedly.

"I know not, friend."

"Ah, it rests with Allah! His name be praised." Ben Ishak puffed steadily. "We wondered, we six Doui-Menia at El Tess, what made the new chief treat Mulud ben Brahim like the smallest of the *meskins*—low born people. The small boys who came near the walls shouted names unfit for men. When boys yelp, the men growl. Thou wilt not repeat my words?"

"No."

"Why didst not thou, who was such a friend of Mulud ben Brahim, prevent these indignities? Mulud ben Brahim knows thee well and, I have heard, has for thee almost the regard he has for his sons."

"I had reasons, which are Roumi's reasons, not to speak."

"I speak too much. Yet, hour by hour we are farther and farther; time is passing and Mulud ben Brahim's pride stings him."

"How long do the camels need to rest, ben Ishak?" Deland asked abruptly.

"Until three hours before dawn. They are not good camels, those we mount and those which bear our packs. It seems as if the captain purposely selected those who were foundered or had saddle sores."

"From that time, going as fast as we can, how long will it take us to reach Ain-el-Gara?"

"We would arrive two hours after midday."

"Dost think we would be recognized from the redoubt?"

"There is a path circling to the east which is invisible from the walls, keeping behind the oasis."

"We turn back then!" Deland said.

IN THE chill preceding dawn they started, after protests from the camels rent the echoes with long drawn out, roaring moans. Ben Ishak clucked his tongue and swung into his fastest chant.

When the sun rose the horizon was clear of life, save in the direction of Ain-el-Gara where flocks of vultures wove tiny dotted patterns against the blue. Now that Deland had turned back he would abide by the decision stubbornly until he was proved wrong by results. Several times he brushed away doubts as to the wisdom of his action with a careless shrug.

He had just glanced at his watch, having recognized a landmark, when a strange vibration resounded.

"*Baroud!*" Ben Ishak exclaimed.

Other tremors shook the air. Deland, bewildered, thought he recognized the crashing of artillery or, more correctly, the explosion of percussion shells striking the earth.

"*Baroud*, my friend, ben Ishak! But who has artillery around here?"

"Mulud ben Brahim," Ben Ishak replied.

Deland laughed. Mulud indeed possessed artillery, long brass tubes, green with age, left behind no one could ascertain how long ago, by a Moroccan *harka* passing on its way to Timbuktu. On the moldy carriages, filled with black cartridges, the guns would prove far more dangerous to those behind than those before. If the fool things were being brought into use today he had been twice right to turn back. It was a thing worth seeing in action, cannon smelted for the ships of Spain in her days of glory.

Bruskly, as if revealed by a sliding curtain, the oasis came in sight, seemingly hung, hewn out of the blue with its canopy of palm leaves neatly traced. Below, blue streaks showed where the ponds caught the reflection of the cloudless sky. On a rugged bluff, Deland saw the native city. All was peaceful. There were no signs of combat. Here and there the barrel of a watchman's gun caught the sun, spilled its rays in long stabbing lances of flame into space.

"Behold!" Ben Ishak called.

Deland followed his gesture. Hanging over the palms, miles away, a dome of smoke, yellow, almost opaque in the stillness. The explosions evidently had occured at the redoubt. In the lull of winds near high noon, the smoke had lingered.

"Stazewski quarrying rocks with dynamite," Deland decided.

THEY came to the gate of the city, which was opened before them after they identified themselves. They ascended the steeply inclined, narrow streets, streets flanked on either side by shallow drains, open sewers stinking in the hot sun. Here and there a grilled window opened into a gloomy cell with a deceiving appearance of mystery. When one passed near, the smell of leather and spices indicated storehouses rather than prisons.

Deland was not greeted cordially. Men even went so far as to spit in his direction and small boys made unseemly gestures. Ben Ishak refused to go farther than the inner fortification surrounding ben Brahim's private residence.

Alone, Deland entered the house, wandered in the gloomy corridors, climbed flights of stairs directed from one room to another by insolent, wrinkled faced gentlemen, who cursed shrilly behind his back. He grasped a fat shoulder, poked his clenched fist into the fellow's side and urged him, in broken Arabic, to lead him to his master.

"*Ya*, Lord! Here it is!"

Deland entered an immense room, furnished chiefly with rugs and hangings.

Mulud ben Brahim was a man of at least sixty-five, big boned, heavier than the average of his race, with a keen, round,

fleshy face, very brown above the snowy beard. He was dressed simply, the sole luxury revealed in the workmanship of the dagger handles protruding from a worn sash. Seated at his feet was a girlish young man, wearing white clothes, his feet shod in red sandals.

"*Sabah! Sidna!*" Deland called out cheerfully. "*Kaf halak?*"

Mulud ben Brahim appeared pleased by the title of excellency. He replied that he felt well. Deland explained haltingly in his broken Arabic that he had traveled back, losing two days, for the sake of taking leave. He went on to state that in his opinion the slights and insults to which the honored Kaid had been submitted were not approved at headquarters:

"Venerable Mulud ben Brahim, favorite of Allah and my friend, dost thou consider the pact broken?"

Mulud did not understand and the young man was called upon to interpret.

"He says no!" the secretary translated, after Mulud had spoken for several minutes. "He speaks thus: He signed the pact for a period of two years. What you do to break the pact is not his business. He keeps his word. Thus, the shame falls on him who first gave the lie to his signature."

"I am happy. Tell him that I shall so inform the colonel."

"But he also has said, lord, that he can not defend the city without good rifles. Should he fight, he would lose his family, his property and his life. So the oasis is free for use to whosoever comes. Until he has rifles again."

"Within ten days there will be a new commander at the redoubt," Deland promised.

Mulud ben Brahim rose, beckoned for Deland to follow. They passed through other corridors, climbed more steps and finally emerged on the topmost terrace of the highest tower. Below spread the oasis and in the distance the brown and yellow surge of the hill on which Deland had lived many months.

"He asks thee to glance at the little fort," said the translator.

"That's what I'm doing," Deland retorted.

He broke off abruptly. He should have distinguished the mirador and other structures. The air though troubled by the quivering heat was sufficiently clear. He uncased his field glasses, placed them to his eyes. A spread of tormented soil, smoking wreckage, tumbled walls, gaping pits.

"They've gone," he said dazedly.

"After spoiling the stores and taking the rifles with them—"

"When?"

"Soon after sunrise, they blow up the place. It was *boom-boom-boom!* Then the soldiers went away, with the mules and the camels and the belongings of each man on each animal."

Martel had received no new orders since his arrival and he had destroyed the labor of months in a few minutes, was taking the detachment Allah only knew where! He snapped the field glasses back into the case, tapped his revolver significantly. He had given up trying to converse in Arabic with Mulud.

"Tell the *sidna*, lad, that if he will but lend me a horse, I shall follow and inquire into all this."

"The *sidna* asks what canst thou do. Men who saw them this morning reported there was one there with more stripes on his sleeves than thou canst show."

"The men know me and will obey me. Grant me the horse."

"Granted," Mulud ben Brahim declared.

He led Deland down to the room where they had met, clapped his hands. An armed man appeared, hawk faced, tall; pink *kaftan* beneath a brown cloak, turbaned with green. Mulud gave him instructions and sent him off. A light meal was served the lieutenant.

TWENTY minutes later, having shaken hands with the old Kaid, Deland descended to the courtyard. Thirty riders were gathered, veterans of many combats, men who had

spent years on the caravan trails, sometimes as guard, more often as pillager. They carried curved sabers, daggers, pistols. Their rifles were chiefly flintlocks, long barreled, slender stocked weapons ornamented with brass nails and silver inlays.

"We are ready," said the leader, ben Quolb, in French.

"I do not need so many. Three will do."

"Very well. Myself and two more." Ben Quolb selected his companions. "They have several hours lead, but our horses are swift and we will catch them before sundown." He hesitated. "The soldiers will not shoot upon us?"

"Am I not with you?"

"That is true."

The last skinful of water was fastened on the saddle. There had been little wind since dawn and the sandy stretches were deep plowed by the hoofs of the mules and camels.

The trail led due north for a few miles, then swerved directly west along a natural pathway made by the arid bed of a forgotten river, a deeply sunk rut forty feet wide edged at long intervals by trees and shrubs. The strong sun swung high, drenching light and dazing heat. For several hours they progressed along this gully. Then came the first sign of the detachment. Around a bend in the trail, two hundred yards ahead, a laden camel came at a gallop, an unsafe gait on rocky soil. Deland soon perceived the government pack. Ben Quolb captured the beast, soothed it by whispering into its ears frightful insults in a tone of caress.

Soon a Legionaire appeared, mounted on a mule, perched comfortably between his equipment, rifle slung across his back, butt near his hand. Happy to be away from supervision, he sang lustily. When he looked up and saw native horsemen within two hundred yards he wheeled and hurried off, tearing at his rifle. Deland galloped his horse toward him crying out in French to ease the terror that gripped a man whose head was filled with tales of capture and torture by primitive foes. The mule stumbled; the rider fell, scrambled to his feet, rifle high, ready to sell his hide dearly. He recognized Deland. His jaw dropped and he panted like a tired dog.

"Cover yourself," Deland ordered. "Your camel is back there a bit. Take it, and lead to Ain-el-Gara."

"Say, Lieutenant, you don't know what a hell of a time we've had with those camels. The captain is nearly crazy. The native drivers ran off when they saw us turning west. Captain said to fire and we did. But we missed. Those fellows had been our pals at the redoubt, remember? Since then we've been going as fast as snails because the camels don't like us and hate the mules even worse."

"How soon can I catch up with the detachment?"

"Shouldn't take long with those horses. Ain-el-Gara, you said, Lieutenant. All right, I'll get there."

Soon the embankment of the dry river bed dwindled, vanished into a flat surface spreading ahead for miles, smooth as a mirror at first glance. A gigantic lump of red rock rose from the plain, less than half a mile away, its base surrounded by sickly, yellow green bushes. Far beyond, rising dust and the unmistakable glitter of sunlight on steel—Martel and the detachment.

DELAND did not wish the natives to witness the scene that must soon take place.

"Turn back and escort the soldier to Ain-el-Gara," he ordered. "Inform your Kaid that the guns will be given him in the morning."

After they had left Deland proceeded once more toward the detachment. Vision grew clearer. From the dull khaki, pinkish faces emerged, a milling, confused caravan, shredding away here and there in knots of camels and mules with shoutmen behind them.

The men had seen him now. Then madness seemed to disintegrate the entire outfit. Camels ran about in all directions. A single rider sprang from the

confusion and was off at a headlong gallop.

Deland loosened his revolver in the holster and rushed into the mob of men and animals.

"Captain Martel—"

"He's beating it," Stazewski cried, and indicated the fleeing figure.

"Gather the bunch together. I'll be back."

Martel had already taken considerable lead. But Deland had been given the best of Mulud's horses. There could be no doubt. Martel was a criminal. A madman would not have fled, would not have been aware of his misdeeds. For a mile the distance separating the two did not perceptibly decrease. Then Deland gained steadily. He drew his revolver. Martel turned and waved his hand warningly. He pointed ahead. New actors had appeared on the scene, fifty or sixty horsemen in dark blue clothing, masked with black beneath the small tight turbans.

Deland halted. Then the sand spurted around him. Coughing detonations of heavy caliber carbines crashed out.

"If he wants to get butchered, let him," Deland muttered, "or else he's a damned traitor."

Martel lifted his hand and the firing ceased. The riders, men from the Draa, evidenced by costume and harness of mounts, obeyed him.

"Go back, Deland, go back!" Martel cried.

Deland hesitated. It was evident that Martel had led the detachment into ambush, for more and more riders appeared. Martel had earned a bullet in the skull. But there were the Legionaires dependent upon him for leadership, the eighty guns belonging to Mulud which were needed to defend Ain-el-Gara.

"See you again soon," Deland cried out, and turned and went back to his men.

The Legionaires had formed in front of their mules, leaving one man of every eight to attend to the animals. Stazewski, coat unbuttoned, undershirt open on his hairy, tattooed chest, ran forward.

"They've killed him?" he asked.

"Received him with open arms. He's one of them!"

"I don't understand."

"Now is no time to try to understand."

"Get off that horse, Lieutenant—they're coming!"

Deland slid to the ground. The Draa men were approaching in a long line. The horsemen must not be allowed to come within rushing distance.

"Fire at will," Deland ordered.

Sharp detonations of Lebels rent the air. Unhurriedly, grimy fists worked the levers, puckered faces cuddled the stocks. The Moors floated uncertainly and made a half hearted onslaught. Before the glittering bayonets they lost courage, turned and fled.

"Two hundred meters," Stazewski sang out.

The horsemen scattered; a few of them dropped. The rest ebbed away and vanished into the surrounding horde. It was evident that the Moors were receiving reinforcements. New elements cropped out of the plain as mysteriously as the first band.

"How many do you think there are?" Deland asked of Stazewski.

"More than enough," the sub-lieutenant replied laconically.

"Looks bad for us," Deland admitted.

He sought a stronger position and decided upon the titanic rock near the end of the gully.

"We'll have only three sides to defend there," he explained to Stazewski. "From those shrubs looks as if there might be moisture. By the way, how much water have we?"

"Three days'."

"Four days on short rations. And we are about ten to one. Recall the old saying, Stazewski: Twenty to one—we are French—odds are even!"

"They used to talk like that," the sub-lieutenant admitted.

He broke off to direct a volley against an enterprising group of Moors who

sought to cut them off in their retreat toward the rock.

"One thing's sure, Lieutenant," he resumed.

"What?"

"That Martel fellow brought us bad luck! Call me superstitious if you wish, but that's my opinion."

THE GREAT pile of rock proved an ideal position for defense. It was less than seven hundred meters from the mouth of the gully and the nude ground between was clear for rifle fire. Even with soldiers less expert than the Legionaires, Deland could have held out for a long time. Huge boulders, broken from the principal pillar of sandstone by the changes in temperature covering centuries, strewed the sand at the base.

The men occupied the northern face, connected the boulders with hastily dug trenches, an improvised breastwork of sand and stones. The mules and camels were driven back into the cleft almost out of sight. Water was rationed. There was no need to limit the ammunition. Cases belonging to Mulud could be broken open when the one hundred rounds carried by each man and the two hundred held in reserve were exhausted. The Moors, following their custom, had vanished from sight leaving only a few mounted men posted on points of vantage, tall, dark, silhouettes out of range of fire made to appear taller by the distortion of vision due to the strong sunlight. Grim, menacing, the alert feelers of the horde lurking behind them.

Often a bullet would strike the stone and ricochet in a prolonged metallic whine. Following this single shot a burst would come, spattering loudly, filling the air with a murderous drone. Vultures nesting high above circled, lighted again, nude, meaty necks twisting, stretching, peering down at the strangers below. One of the more nervous youngsters, fighting his first encounter, risked a shot upward. Stazewski protested profanely against the waste of powder.

"Say, those guys seem in no hurry to trot out against us," he offered some time later.

"They're surrounding us completely," Deland declared shortly.

"Some one's coming," a private called out.

Deland crawled forward with his field glasses and lay flat against the sand. There was much activity going on before him, small groups of men afoot finding cover fifteen hundred yards away. They wore brown *jellabas*, short sleeved, short skirted garments that left arms and legs free and bandoleers slung across their shoulders.

NEARER, coming forward at a trot, were two horsemen. The first was white clad, obviously a leader. The other carried a long pole at the end of which a white cloth hung limply.

"Flag of truce!" he announced, rising.

"The pagans have social manners," Stazewski remarked.

"With a gentleman as careful as Martel it would be the devil's own work if they hadn't."

"Speaking of Martel, I think that's him, dressed like a *bico*," Stazewski declared. "And he looks grand in those rags, too."

The rider in the lead motioned to his follower, evidently ordering him to remain behind. Then he dismounted and came forward. He had dropped his dark veil so that his face was framed between the black cotton and the folds of the white hood covering the colored turban. It was Martel and it was not Martel. A convulsive grin showed white through his tan.

"You came back too soon, Deland," he said.

"Yes, wasn't it a great idea? If I had not come the detachment would be massacred by now."

"I swear to you it would have been safe. It would take too long to explain what occurred. I am Louis Chalabre. You may have heard of me—"

"God!" Deland laughed. "And nine out of ten men I've met howled that you were innocent. But go on. What have you come for? To apologize?"

"No." Chalabre shook his head. "I have no excuse to offer. If I told you my reasons you wouldn't believe me, not after what's happened, not with the first *birek* of Khebba ben Khellaf's *harka* before you. A charge *en masse* would crush you. I tried to obtain the best terms possible, in my present situation among the natives. I have succeeded in a measure."

"I had an idea your people knew only one set of terms for surrender: 'No harm shall be done the prisoners beyond severing the head at the neck.'" Deland smiled. "You have indeed brought them progress. Unfold your proposition, Chalabre."

"You will give up your baggage, your mules, your camels. You will lay down your arms. One man in each squad will keep a rifle for use against raiders who do not owe us allegiance. You will proceed to Ain-el-Gara where Mulud ben Brahim will supply you with transportation north. You will give your parole that neither you nor any of the men present will bear arms against Khebba ben Khellaf's troops or those of his allies for a period of two years. In exchange you have life and a supply of water."

Deland smiled mockingly:

"Need I say that I refuse?"

"No. But I gave my oath to try this first proposition."

"There is another?"

"Yes. One more compatible with honor. I begged for it, so don't cast it aside lightly. There will be three thousand men around here by noon tomorrow. You will keep your arms, your mules and be given enough water to reach the next well north."

"And no parole asked?"

"No parole."

"In other words, you let us go rather than lose the two hundred odd lives it would cost you to take us. At that, it's a fair proposition. What is the catch in it, Chalabre?"

"None. The only thing you'll have to do is give up the rifles belonging to Mulud ben Brahim."

"Too bad," Deland said musingly. "We were getting along so well! What's the third proposition?"

Chalabre shrugged his shoulders and, in a quiet voice, said—

"There is none."

"We refuse, naturally. At least I believe Stazewski is of the same mind."

"I am," Stazewski declared.

"One more question before you go, Chalabre? What happened to Captain Martel?"

"He is a prisoner. You have spoken your last word?"

"Weren't you a French officer once?"

Chalabre winced.

"I was. And I approve of you. In any case, you won't be attacked until daylight. If you think better of it, hoist a white flag and the last proposition will be carried out. I've done what I can to save you."

Chalabre offered his hand mechanically, then when Deland drew back, bit his lips and turned away. He walked unsteadily to his horse, mounted and was off. Stazewski lifted his revolver.

"Flag of truce!" Deland reminded him.

"Right you are, *cochon d'sort!*" Stazewski dropped the heavy service weapon into the holster.

"We have a few hours before us," Deland resumed, "and, though we better not trust them too far I believe they'll keep the truce promised by Chalabre. We must get a few marksmen to the top of that rock for the time when the fireworks start. Allah meant it for snipers. By the way, had I not stopped you, would you have pressed the trigger?"

Stazewski wrinkled his colorless eyebrows, puckered his lips in deep thought.

"No. No matter how much he deserved it—" the sub-lieutenant stammered, sought for the right words to express his feelings. "I— I felt kind of sorry for him. Suppose those charges hadn't been true? And anyway, it hurts a man to be a swine."

"And there you are," Deland concluded. He raised his voice. "*Hep, les gars!* Volunteers to climb that tombstone. Who'll be first up the obelisk?"

CHAPTER V

FLESH AND METAL; BLOOD AND BLADES

THE PASHA of Tafilalet was coming down; his first bands had already arrived. More were coming in each hour. The Mauritanian holy man, Ma el Ayenin, was sending many riflemen who would swell Khebba ben Khellaf's ranks before they reached Hassi-Mazzer, trained warriors all, Arabs and Arabized Berbers, Kountas from the Sudanese fringe, Thrarza and Ouled Moussa from the western hills.

Barthez, brilliant as a tropical bird, in chief's garb, commanded the advance guard until Khebba ben Khellaf should arrive the following day with his army. Chalabre was without authority. The terms he had obtained he had pleaded for, descended almost to humiliation. When he reported the failure of his mission the pompous little El Kassir spoke to him as to an underling.

"Bad faith!" Chalabre said coldly. "Khebba had promised me to come with but a small escort."

"He had an idea you'd fail," Barthez retorted. "And we came just in time to keep that young fellow from getting you."

"It takes time to send men long distances," Chalabre pointed out. "Many of these warriors had left their tents weeks before I reached Ain-el-Gara. I have been used to remove the chief obstacle, the redoubt. Mulud ben Brahim is disarmed. Through me, many Frenchmen will fall."

Barthez straightened his short torso, spread his legs wide, hands on hips.

"My friend, if I have any advice to offer, it is to turn a new leaf. Forget you're French. I tell you, were Spaniards ahead of me, I would not hesitate."

"We are different," Chalabre reminded him.

"Less than you think."

"I could kill you," the Frenchman mused, "but I don't want to be out of the way myself—just yet."

"Hope to change Khebba's mind?" Barthez laughed. "Go ahead. Of course at your request he'll tell all these men to go home and forget what they came for!"

Several times Chalabre rode out to the front line and scanned the vicinity of the rock. After nightfall fires glowed behind the boulders. Chalabre had told Barthez that Deland had asked until daylight to make a decision. When Barthez saw that the Legionaires were employing the truce to scale the rock he sent one hundred and fifty men to occupy the nude stretch between the detachment and the mouth of the gully, cutting off retreat.

When the first light of day was suspended like a gray fog over the earth, Chalabre wandered through the camp, which he found had been enlarged during the night. In spite of his heavy heart he was fascinated. There were representatives from every people known to him and types he had never seen. Gaunt, starved herders from the desolate Irikli region, men who were said to live on grass and milk; short, wiry, half nude fighting men, whose language none seemed to comprehend; men with thick legs and deep chests, forgotten breeds whom the summons to fight the infidel had dragged from their leather tents in the unknown.

Another group, the adventurers, the free booters, the scum of the Moroccan South, who were inspired neither by racial loyalty nor religious fervour but had come in the hope of loot. On the way they had stolen women from the *douars* they passed and fought constantly among themselves. Elsewhere, he saw non-combatants, jugglers, snake charmers, camp followers. There were deflated water skins and squeals of complaint. Every one longed for Ain-el-Gara and the oasis.

THIRST was forgotten in milling groups surrounding preachers, who shouted encouragement and repeated the prophecies of Khebba ben Khellaf. Chalabre halted before a skinny giant, nude save for a loincloth, ribs standing out like barrel staves above the flat stomach. The *marabout's* eyes were bloodshot, his unkempt beard flecked

with foam. He spoke in Arabic, then in Druya, the dialect of the hills, even in Tebbu, so that all might understand.

"The brethren are gathering from the desert like the rising of a storm. Before them, the infidels tremble. For it is written in the Book: Hell shall be their abiding place and boiling water their drink. Khebba ben Khellaf has the *baraka* of Allah. In his veins flows the blood of the Last Prophet, Our Lord Mohammed. He will lead us to victory against the infidel, who has given companions unto Allah. Paradise opens for him who falleth, provided he look upon the man who slays him!"

Chalabre smiled. A master stroke of Khebba's—this prediction. At long range the French and their soldiers were superior marksmen, a superiority which vanished at shorter distances. Thus, the warrior would seek to come within range before firing, wishing to rest his eyes, even for a second, upon the infidel. This assured good shooting for Khebba and everlasting bliss for the man who fell.

Vendors of amulets against lead, against steel, against brass, were doing a thriving business. At a distance, the sterner, quieter men were at prayer, facing the rising sun, silhouetted against the crimson flush of the sky. Chalabre mechanically joined them, knelt after spreading his rug, and raised his hands in unison.

"There is no God but God!"

When he rose he found a hand on his shoulder.

"The fighting will soon start," El Bokhari said.

"I know. Allah guard thee, brother."

"I do not fight today," El Bokhari replied. "I must take thee to the rear and watch thee until Khebba ben Khellaf comes."

"If I don't submit?"

El Bokhari grasped his sword by the middle, held up the polished copper handle.

"This . . ."

"When does thy work start?"

"With the first shot fired. It is feared, I suppose, that blood will call loudly to thee after that."

Chalabre bent over a heap of embers to light his cigaret.

"The first shot has not been fired, El Bokhari."

"It has not."

"Then I am still free."

"Save only that I must follow thee, El Rhezim."

Chalabre quickened his steps. Again into his brain came that rebellious surging rancour against all men. It was to be the same always. Prison on that side, and prison on this. They came to the animal lines. Chalabre selected a horse, ready saddled, bearing, embroidered upon the harness in gold letters his own mark, belonging therefore to one of his personal attendants. He mounted. El Bokhari picked out another horse at random and followed.

"At the first shot we turn," he reminded Chalabre.

The Frenchman nodded, his face placid. He trotted his horse toward the front, followed by his guard. Reserves, massed in hollows, greeted him respectfully. Was he not El Rhezim, whom they had seen often riding among them before combat? Chalabre rode through a swarm of riflemen afoot, long, skinny legs flashing, rifles swinging free, *flissas* passed in the rope or leather girdles. A small drum throbbed steadily, matching the pulsating blood in his temples. On all sides rose the shrieking of the *marabouts*.

"Best to halt now, brother," El Bokhari warned.

"There has not yet come the first shot."

More and more men sliding to cover. On the left a rattle of shot ripped out. El Bokhari grasped Chalabre's horse by the bridle.

"By Allah," Chalabre said tensely. "I warn thee to leave me alone, El Bokhari!"

"I obey my master. But my life is thine for the taking," El Bokhari replied. He did not unsheath his sword but waited for the blow.

"May I be forgiven!" Chalabre's right fist drew back, crashed forward. Again, and El Bokhari, stunned, nose and

lips bleeding, dropped to the ground. "*Balek!* Make way!" he cried.

Again he was recognized, cheered:

"El Rhezim! He is to lead!"

Between Chalabre and the open remained a charging line of riders. Once through them, he would have a clear field for the rock. The ranks parted; he slipped through. . .

DELAND had climbed to the top during the night, using the lengths of thick wire, the wire used to tie the mules during halts, left as a hand rail by the first man to ascend. Even under cover of darkness, unhampered by flying lead, the ascension was a feat. Cords had been let down to draw up canteens and ammunition. They were eight on the platform, a sloping stone, heated by the sun, thickly covered with filth. Deland from time to time dropped messages for Stazewski, weighed with empty shells.

He lifted himself on his elbows, peered over the edge. Ninety feet below, the plain spread out like a map, criss crossed with shadowy patches. Four hundred yards from the base was the first line of native riflemen, backed by another in the rear more solidly occupied. Farther, in sweeping hollows of the soil, many tents were erected, small shelters of black leather or brightly striped canvas. These camps formed little pools from which flowed long lines of laden camels, riders, men afoot, stretching interminably against the yellow sand. The rising sun threw a red flame over the whole, rays caught on buckles, on saddle pommels, on the handles of knives, the barrels of rifles.

"This is like a circus—good idea, to come up here," one of the Legionaires said.

"What a lot of men!" A comrade spoke up. "You'd think they made them with machinery."

"We're cooked," added a good looking man of thirty-five, the sharp outline of his long jaw throwing through his beard in the morning light. "Even if Hassi-Mazzer is warned it would take days to come down with troops. And we have water for only four."

"Don't like the idea?" Deland asked, over his shoulder.

"I don't mind. I've had everything a man could wish. At twenty-five I was a lieutenant, at thirty a captain. At thirty-one, nothing. Still sinking. Here I am, second class private in the Legion."

"I wish we were going to get out," Deland declared. "I'd make you a non-com and you'd have reached bottom."

There were no corporals or sergeants present and this was received joyously. Without hope, they nevertheless felt like conquerors. From the high perch they could look down with a sense of utter detachment from the world.

"Do you think we're cooked, Lieutenant, as that guy says?"

"We're poor risks for an insurance company," Deland admitted. "But you never can tell. Isn't this what you came to the Legion for? Look out there—more targets than you can attend to!"

"No, I didn't come here to shoot anybody especially." The private was a slender youth, beard scarcely showing on his chin. "I stole a bicycle and everybody said I was no good and would end in the Legion. So I came."

"It's all right," some one assured him. "I came because I croaked a man. And don't bother the lieutenant. He isn't a priest."

High overhead the vultures circled anxiously, doubtless wondering when the invaders of their home would leave. In the sky streamy clouds with red bellies floated lazily.

"They're coming!"

A CONFUSED mass of horsemen were crossing the last outposts, galloping forward five yards apart, between one hundred and one hundred and fifty men, Ouled bu Annam tribesmen by their dress.

"Fire on the men afoot," Deland ordered. "Sub-lieutenant Stazewski will attend to the riders."

The men below opened fire. Saddles

were emptied. Riderless horses raced about. One of the chiefs stood erect on the back of his horse, swinging his sword. Then he fell. The entire will of the followers had been concentrated in the leader, their valor in his shimmering blade. They turned and went back. All save one, who came on. The men on top of the rock fired at footmen who were crawling nearer.

The attack was soon broken, the venturesome riflemen momentarily discouraged. Deland rolled a cigaret. Around him the Legionaires were again chatting.

"Message, Lieutenant!" said the private who was in charge of communication with Stazewski.

He had a string tied around his wrist the end of which dangled below. He detached a bit of paper and passed it to Deland. Stazewski's usual scrawl, with faults of grammar and spelling.

> Chalabre came in. Says he wants to speak to you. What shall I do? One man killed and two wounded.

Chalabre? What did he want? Another proposition of surrender. Unlikely, for no white flag had been shown. The firing was continuous. Even at the moment lead spattered against the stone, whirred overhead.

Deland brought out his notebook and wrote a reply:

> If Chalabre wishes to see me, he'll have to wait until night. Unless he cares to come up here now. It isn't likely he will. Have him bound; don't take any chance of trickery. If he tries anything blow his brains out.

He wrapped the paper around two empty shells and sent it down on the string. In the brief moment he was exposed over the brim his battered helmet became a target.

"Some one's coming up, Lieutenant!"

Pattering of missiles below, creeping upward steadily, bullets seeking a man ascending. The men on the platform stared at each other disbelievingly. It was impossible to imagine a man climbing that rock, hugging the face in a spitting rain of lead.

A turban appeared. Willing hands reached out and down, grasped the man's wrists, hauled him to safety. His palms were bloody. He had not paused once on the way. Fear or despair had urged him on.

"WHAT do you want?" Deland asked.

"Death for death. I prefer to meet mine with you."

"You came here to die?"

"Yes."

"And what will you do here save drink our water—"

"Borrow a rifle, end it decently."

His hand reached out to grasp a weapon. Deland halted him with a gesture. There had come a murmur of dissent from the men.

"What do you think?" Deland asked. "You know who he is, what he's done."

One by one the Legionaires shook their heads.

"You don't trust me? Think I'll do something dirty?" Chalabre asked. "I'd be thrown over the edge the next moment. Though I meant well enough, I got you here—"

The men laughed derisively.

"And I came to share your lot. Believe me, I had but to make a little offer like this on the other side and I'd have been taken back in."

"We have no longer the choice as to whether we shall live or die," said the second class private who had once been an officer. "But we still have the right to say *how*. Among us, leaving the lieutenant out of it, there are men who have been in prison. There is at least one assassin. There are several thieves. The habits of most of us would shock good people. But it is our right to finish things neatly."

Chalabre smiled gently.

"I have three years term of prison against me. I qualify."

"You don't understand, monsieur. We accept all men save traitors."

Chalabre's face changed. He stood up, ignoring the bullets, lit a cigaret. Once again, his face became calm. Deland was forced to admire the dignity of the man who could face insult and scorn without bowing his head. He did not draw away when Chalabre sat down beside him.

"We have no hope of rescue, Lieutenant. So that you know I shall not try to persuade you of my innocence in the hope that you will speak for me later. But I care for your opinion. You are what I was at your age, Deland. In all fairness, as becomes one who hopes to die decently within numbered hours, listen to me."

Deland listened. The tale unfolded in the reek of smoke, the stench of human bodies crowded in the sun. De Bremond, De Castex, Fangeas and the Ministry; Khebba ben Khellaf, Halbwachs, El Bokhari, Barthez. Chalabre's hopes, his problems, his life. No lies could come from a man who considered himself dead, considered his listener dead. It was a weird, ghastly recital. Deland glanced around uneasily. Was Chalabre a phantom?

Deland laughed nervously.

"That was a good yarn—worth the rifle if you want it."

Chalabre hesitated.

"These men here say I'm a renegade, a traitor. So much of a traitor that I was ready to fire upon men who have been my companions for years. If there be any shame that is my shame."

"Perhaps that is what the men feel."

"Those fellows out there have virtues of their own; they live true to their code—save those who reach the top and become leaders, even as in our country. All that I found among the French, I found among them. Friends among the lowly, brave men among the fighters, and politics. In both places I was the victim of politics."

"And in both places you ran away."

"I found all men against me, sooner or later. I got to hate those poor devils below for obeying Khebba. Awhile back I hated these poor devils up here for calling me a traitor. I begin to see what they mean. They do not know that when I saw you—about to be attacked—making your last defense up here on the rock—then I knew which side I was on."

"Seven hundred meters, those lads on the right!" Deland called out.

"I know which side I am on," Chalabre repeated. "I can not be on both."

"A man should lie down with whatever bedfellows he elects," Deland offered.

"I'm going back out there, Deland! I have a plan that will mean salvation for you, if it works." He stared at the lieutenant eagerly. "Do you trust me? Will you let me go out?"

Deland hesitated. But only for a moment. He looked deep into Chalabre's eyes, read there his tortured sincerity.

"I'll give you a note for Stazewski," he said.

Chalabre rose calmly.

"I can reach Khebba ben Khellaf unscathed. I've escaped enough lead since dawn to wipe out a regiment."

Deland wrote the order, then stirred to emulation, stood beside Chalabre. For a brief moment they smiled at each other. Then Chalabre crouched to slide over the edge, grasping the guide wire with his left hand.

"Good luck," Deland said, hand outstretched.

"Thanks," Chalabre replied.

The corded top of the turban, the broad shoulders under the burnous receded, were lost to view.

EL BOKHARI was the first to meet him. The Tripolitan's face was bruised, but he smiled broadly.

"In time to save my head, brother, which Khebba ben Khellaf would have asked instead of thine."

"Oh, my head is to fall?" Chalabre asked.

Bokhari denied his first hasty words, but without conviction.

"Where is Khebba, El Bokhari?"

"He is in sight, and all are gathering to meet him save those now fighting."

"Let us go, also."

The Berber's arrival befitted a conqueror. Riders carried sacred standards before him, green, black, embroidered with gold devices, surmounted by the crescent. He was on a magnificent white horse and passed through the shouting mob of welcomers without glancing to right or left, his eyes fastened on a mystic spot miles ahead. He was the man with the *baraka*, the descendant of the Prophet!

Attendants cleared a vast space, held back the crowd. Among the first of Khebba's escorts was Halbwachs. Important chieftains rushed forward to hold the master's bridle, to bend low for the touch of his hand as he dismounted. Colossal blacks brought a seat for him, placed it in the center of an immense carpet, woven in soft colors and fine patterns. A bank of flowers seemed to have grown out of the arid sand. Water was offered him as refreshment for the long and strenuous ride. He had left a more comfortable booth atop a camel to make a more dignified entrance on horseback. In the midst of three thousand thirsting men, he cast what he did not want on to the ground.

"So my head was to fall in any case," Chalabre thought.

Before Khebba half a hundred notables were bending low, begging a smile, a glance or recognition. The Berber distributed praise, blame, punishment, with calm disdain. He was in white with a crimson sash girdling his belly. Over this sash, last pretense at the warrior's trade, he had buckled a broad belt of tan leather, holding two daggers and a pistol.

The confused murmur ended upon a signal.

"El Kassir!" Khebba called. Barthez stepped forward, bent low and waited. "Why didst thou halt before reaching Ain-el-Gara, as I ordered? The answer must be good, else thy head falls."

The Berber swept the crowd with a glance as if asking approval for his masterful ways. Yet he frowned with false modesty when the flattering murmur lifted.

"I have sent word to thee, lord," Barthez shrilled in his high, clear voice.

"I know. But repeat thy words once more that all may hear. For I wish all to know whether I be just or unjust."

"There are fifty soldiers barring passage to the city, lord."

"Fifty soldiers! Of what rare breed are they that they hold thee back with so many at thy command!"

"They are but men, lord. I could have brushed them aside easily. But there came one who is favored of thee, for whom thou hast done a thousand kindnesses. He spoke in thy name, said it would be thy desire to parley with them. I allowed the night to pass. And then I waited for thee."

"Sherf Mulay Mustefa will arrive," Khebba resumed, "and he will find us halted by fifty men. It is shame to cast into my teeth. Who was the man, El Kassir, who spoke in my name?"

CHALABRE came forward.

"I am the man, Khebba ben Khellaf."

"Thou? My patience is near its end."

"The future belongs to him that is patient," Chalabre said. "The little man lies. There was a council of the chiefs and there it was decided."

"Thou didst go back with the infidels once more today," Khebba said, smiling.

"Thou knowest that? Then why talk to such lengths for the benefit of the many?"

"Because I am just. I want those I judged to be judged by all. They may talk openly."

"I shall not be halted if I, also, talk openly?"

Khebba hesitated perceptibly, then agreed—

"By Allah, no!"

"Khebba ben Khellaf, thou didst help me to flee from my pursuers. In return I fought for thee, with the Sons of the Sword. You have behind you on this day those left after six years of fighting. Twice as many have gained Paradise. Those who are left—what has been their

reward? Command over others, property, women, yes! But we lost a friend. We who followed are still lean, strong and brave. But we have no longer a chief, we have a master. We are no longer warriors; we are slaves."

The Ouled el Seif, lined behind Khebba, stirred uneasily. Chalabre swept their faces with a rapid glance. He knew they recalled long evenings when he had talked and Khebba had listened.

Khebba cleared his throat, seemed about to speak, then recalled his oath and waited for Chalabre to continue.

"See him as he is now, brothers? Is he the one for whom we fought, in whom we believed? I advised a pact with the French. By Allah, I had the common good at heart then. They are the masters of the hour. They are mighty. It is foolish to fight them; we are still far from their territories. We must go far to encounter them. They bring much lead and little booty. For the worth of a single camel taken from them, how many desert men die?"

"Many," said a voice from the massed crowd.

"Khebba ben Khellaf once called me brother. Then El Kassir came. And he poisoned his brain. Who of you, brothers, is as near Khebba ben Khellaf as this man, who came when the great work was done? He flatters the man who was once our equal and now who can not ride the span of one day. It is said that I betrayed you yesterday and today. No one says I betrayed you a moon ago, two moons ago when I advised the pact with the French. I left on a dangerous mission to serve the common good, to gain, without bloodshed, additional years of freedom from the French. On my return I find that he, who called me brother to my face, plotted with this other to make my head fall with seeming justice. As Allah hears this, El Kassir, do I speak the truth? Was not my head forfeited long ago?"

"As Allah hears me," Barthez replied with a thin smile, "thou liest."

"And Khebba ben Khellaf, true believer, as Allah hears thee, do I speak the truth?"

Khebba lifted his hand, motioned toward Chalabre, scorning to answer. The followers waited for the voiced reply. The tension grew.

The Berber rose, his face purplish, sweat glistening on his cheeks. He had the choice between a public confession of plotting against one whom he named brother and the swearing of a false oath before Allah. He drew a long barreled pistol from his belt. In the concealed pocket of his *gandoura* sleeve, the Frenchman's hand closed on the butt of the automatic. He whitened but did not flinch.

"Fire, Khebba ben Khellaf," he said, "then answer!"

"Die, dog!"

But the Berber's eye had lost its keenness. The bullet went wide, wounded a man in the rear of the group.

"They are waiting, all these men, to hear thy voice!" Chalabre shouted.

"By Allah!" Khebba dragged the words with tremendous effort from his throat, "By Allah, El Rhezim speaks the truth!"

Chalabre's hand appeared holding the automatic. He turned toward Barthez. The Spaniard fell to the carpet with a hole in his skull.

"Khebba ben Khellaf!" Chalabre said accusingly. "If such treatment awaited me, what befell the Frank, Captain Martel? In exchange for what I have done for thee his life was to be spared."

"The Christian was beheaded."

Cold rage swept Chalabre. A hundred swords were unsheathed. But he was tired of life. His hand was raised once more, the slender muzzle pointing toward the Emir el Seif. No one moved to interfere. Lead could not wound Khebba, who had the *baraka*, upon whose forehead the finger of Allah was laid.

Half swayed by superstition, Chalabre hesitated. The Berber smiled disdainfully. Then the Frenchman pressed the trigger, once, twice, three times.

Khebba ben Khellaf stood an instant,

utter stupefaction written on his face, mouth opened, eyes staring. His knees buckled slowly, his torso bent forward. He fell at last, like a log, and lay face down. One hand was outflung, plump and white; the turban unrolled from his red, pointed skullcap.

The Sons of the Sword, after a few seconds of astonishment, came forward and turned the corpse face upward.

"He is dead, El Rhezim," one of the number said respectfully. "His *baraka* has abandoned him!" He picked up the automatic from where it had fallen when Chalabre had cast it aside, held it in his palm, regarded it curiously. "With such a tiny weapon, too!"

"SOMETHING'S happened out there, Lieutenant," said the private who had known the best and worst of life.

"You may get that promotion I promised you." Deland kept his glasses on the confused mass of men which had gathered far off out of rifle range and which was now dispersing in all directions.

"Everything is queer about this," the private resumed. "The big chief out there should have covered us with a curtain of riflemen and gone on his way to Ain-el-Gara. He's still here, using an enormous hammer to crack a mighty small nut."

"Saharan reasons of which we know not," Deland hinted.

Chalabre evidently had kept his promise. A queer chap to swing thus from one camp to the other, win friends here, win friend there, and invariably end in a mess.

Mounted men galloped toward the front lines; in another instant riflemen rose from cover, gesticulating, shouting. The shots of the Legionaires dropped many of their number. Behind the fighting lines, like a house of cards tumbling, tents were coming down. The pools formed by the camps flowed westward again in rivulets of men. The riflemen who had closed the path to the gully, who formed the cork of the bottle in which the detachment was caught, swerved north, moved toward the main body.

In the open, where the dead and wounded had been left by receding waves of attack, natives in groups of three or four prowled about, stripping the dead of clothing and arms, carrying the wounded back, busy as ants with grains of wheat. Often the searchers took cover hastily from the copper nosed missiles of the Legionaires.

Deland, seeing that they no longer returned the shots, that their sole thought was to bury their dead and care for their wounded, humanely gave the order to cease firing.

"Come on, we better get down," he suggested.

The body of one man, killed on the rock, was lowered first. The men then gathered their rifles, folded the canvas cloths unhurriedly, placing pride in showing no more elation before salvation than they had shown fear before death.

"Your turn, Lieutenant! I've got to loose the wire on the way down."

Stazewski greeted Deland at the bottom.

"I don't understand it at all," he said.

"Chalabre is taking them away. I don't know how he did it but behold results. They seemed to hold a conference, then groups broke up and the retreat started."

"Shall we pursue, Lieutenant?" Stazewski asked.

Stazewski was serious. Deland laughed at the sublime conceit of the old veteran.

"We better make for Ain-el-Gara and throw in our lot with Mulud ben Brahim, before the Tafilalet bunch appears. They're due this afternoon. Sometime I'll tell you a long story, Stazewski."

"Shall we bury our dead? Counting yours we have four."

"It sounds better to state they were buried in a cemetery under crosses. Let's go."

The bugler stepped forward, lifted his instrument, sounded the call. Mules and camels were hurriedly packed.

"There's an echo—" Stazewski remarked.

"The rock throws back the sound, maybe," Deland admitted.

He listened intently. At first, the notes merged with the excited pounding of the blood in his ears, then he grasped Stanzewski by the shoulder:

"Echo! That's 'colors'!"

The gully formed an immense horn which brought the vibrations from afar. As they marched through the natural corridor cleaving the ground, the bugler signaled at intervals. Other calls answered, nearer and nearer.

TWO HOURS after leaving the rock they met the company of Meharistes. The leader, a lieutenant, halted his camel beside Deland, reached down to shake his hand.

"Thought you were much worse off," he said. "Where's the enemy? How strong?"

"Three thousand strong—due west."

The lieutenant of Meharistes whistled softly.

"There's a column coming behind."

Soon after the detachment stood aside to allow a swarm of cavalrymen to pass by. There were the red cloaks of the Spahis, the Mokhazenis in blue, gray and green, a brilliant cavalcade dotted at intervals by the white or khaki uniform of an officer. Another hour's march and they met light companies of Tirailleurs, gaunt Arab and Berber soldiers.

"Hello, Deland," greeted a captain. "Thought you were done up by now. Fifty kilometers a day for six days, that's what we've done." He added with a malicious smile, "The staff gave out at Ain-el-Gara!"

"DO YOU recognize them, Halbwachs?" Chalabre asked.

"I do, chief. They're the Mokhazenis from Hassi-Mazzer!"

"Yes." Chalabre shrugged. "I was the first European leader they had. Those behind us—" he indicated the Ouled el Seif, lined behind him—"I trained them also. If we let the Mokhazenis through they'll kill those demoralized men back there like sheep. Sundown is thirty minutes off. There are perhaps a hundred ahead. We should be able to keep them busy."

"We should, chief."

"Not you. Go back with the rest."

Halbwachs laughed:

"And leave you? Not much."

"Why not? All right, have it your own way." He turned, lifted his hand. "Come on, lads."

The Mokhazenis, who had outlasted the Meharistes, being in reality a selection of the best men mounted on the best horses, took notice of the horsemen which had halted across their path. A rider in khaki, a lieutenant, by the two conspicuous stripes of gold on his sleeve, lifted his hand as Chalabre had done. The two lines advanced. The irregulars of France overlapped the Ouled el Seif on both sides.

Halbwachs drew his sword. Chalabre smiled. His right hand hung limply at his side, the left grasped the reins. He could lead without striking.

He had sought justice; he must grant justice. These men behind him had been loyal. They were serving their people, accepting the entire burden thrown on them by the panic of the rest. Their deeds had been legendary in the desert. Their names must not be held to scorn; it must not be said that they had failed in the moment of danger. Chalabre had been their chief once, Chalabre had killed their commander. He was of them—against all men.

"Sabers!" the French lieutenant cried.

The first time those men across the way had unsheated their blades in obedience to a command in French, Chalabre had spoken.

"They're coming, chief," Halbwachs warned.

Chalabre smiled, a superior smile. Rash fool, that officer. The fitting thing to do would have been to dismount and open fire, to fight at long range instead of coming to grips, where one man becomes the equal of another.

"Strike!" he called, urging his horse into a gallop.

The two lines closed together in a whirl of dust. The shock of horses and men was formidable. The smaller party cleaved through their foes behind Chalabre. Carbines crackled. Powder burned Chalabre's beard. Clear of the mass, he swung about, charged through again, without raising his hand.

"Strike!"

The French lieutenant reformed his men to face the third charge. Chalabre laughed, led the Ouled el Seif in a diagonal rush that crumbled the wavering line of Mokhazenis. This was easy, if one knew, if one had done it fifty times. The French officer was stubborn, tried the same tactics once more and was smashed once again. He singled out Chalabre, strove to reach him, lunging at times over the rumps, over the necks of other horses. El Rhezim smiled upon him, swerved his mount, avoided his rushes.

"Away!" El Rhezim cried.

The Ouled el Seif darted off like swallows, formed again with the precision of ballet dancers.

"Strike!"

Where was Halbwachs? Stupid of him to have remained. The French officer held a revolver in his hand. He fired, once, twice, three times, as he, Chalabre had fired into Khebba. But perhaps Chalabre had inherited the *baraka;* lead could not touch him . . .

Lead could not touch him—for he was soaring high, high above the swirl of steel and twisted faces spinning below him, before his eyes in an ever narrowing, concentric wheel of flesh and metal.

Flesh and metal—blood and blades. . . .

THE EURASIAN

by Harry A. Franck

INDIA TYPES (III)

WELL on in the afternoon we had stretched out in the meager shade of a choking tree, to the northward of Trichinopoly. A youth, in ragged cotton jacket and trousers, drew near with an apologetic grimace and sat down not far distant. His features and gestures were distinctly Hindu, his general appearance that of some Babu eager to air his shopworn stock of English. My surprise was not slight, therefore, when he suddenly addressed us, not in the pedantic, patchwork language of the missions schools, but in the flowing tongue of Tommy Atkins, with a decided Irish brogue. The ice once broken, he launched forth into autobiography and, after the fashion of the East, droned out with half closed eyes and easy posture, the detailed story of his past. He was a Eurasian, the first with whom I had come into personal contact. His father had been a soldier of the Queen, hailing from Belfast, who had ended his days early, on the barricaded rock high above the city behind us. His mother, no doubt—though on this point our new acquaintance volunteered no information—had been some daughter of the teeming bazaars, in the shadow of the garrison eyrie.

Of his story there was little else worth retaining. Early an orphan, he had drifted on into life like every tropical halfbreed, working a bit when the spirit moved—which most often it did not—and somehow arriving, fairly fed and in good health, at the entrance to manhood, prepared to drift aimlessly to the final exit.

His tale over, we accepted his invitation to "take a drive" and, packing ourselves away in the sweltering interior of a bullock cart, jolted away over the hills and dales of the environs of Trichinopoly.

The offspring of white men and native

women hold a unique position in the social structure of caste bound British India. In a land where each and every individual is doomed irrevocably to fellowship with a single stratum of society, where the gulf between white ruler and native subject is broad and utterly impassible, the Eurasian is a race apart. He is neither fish nor fowl; like the coffin of Mohammed, as it were, he hovers in mid-air between the lofty and reverenced "sahib" and the despised "nigger".

In our own land the prejudices of whites, and the "Jim Crow" laws, bear as heavily upon the mulatto or the octoroon, though he be far more white than black, as upon the full lipped African. The Eurasian of British India, on the other hand, is nearer to the white man than to the native. In the social scale he stands one degree lower than the European. Though the white resident does not recognise him as an equal, he grants him precedence and authority over the native. The Hindu shows him a degree less of obedience and obsequiousness than to the white man, yet accepts him, to all outward appearance, as a social superior, and addresses him as "sahib", though not always with the best grace, nor without a mutter of coolie ancestry.

Even the laws of the viceroy's government are divided into three sets, acknowledging this triple division of the population. If the statute does not contain a clause specifically fixing the status of the Eurasian, he is legally an European. He is as immune from arrest by native officers as an Englishman. Certain compartments of railway trains are reserved for Europeans and Eurasians.

The law concerning the treatment of indigent travelers, on the other hand, orders the authorities to furnish, in addition to transportation, Europeans with one rupee a day for food, Eurasians with a half rupee, and natives with four annas. Yet the halfbreed is barred as absolutely from Hindu restaurants and places of worship as is an Englishman; his touch is pollution to all castes. In consequence, his intercourse is confined for the most part to his fellow hybrids, and though their number is legion in British India, he not seldom leads a lonely and joyless life of semi-isolation.

The bullock cart—to grant it an unprofane appellation to which it was by no means entitled—fell motionless, at last, before a tumble down shop and our Iro-Indian comrade, in pursuance to his promise to introduce us to a new beverage, led the way inside. At his order the tavern keeper caught up two of a myriad of empty bottles scattered on the ground about him, with an "Acha-ah-er-sahib," and wandering into a far corner of the hut, filled them at the spigot of a wooden cask. My astonished throat, parched with the dust of an Indian highway, and anticipating some fiery arrack, hailed with delight a liquid as mild as sweet cider; and the bottles were soon returned for refilling.

"Nary a once have ye tasted it?" grinned the Eurasian.

"Never," I answered.

"'Tis toddy," he announced, still grinning at my ignorance. "An' a good dhrink it is, an' no mistake. For it costs no more nor two annas the bottle, an' once ye get dhrunk on it, it is dhrunk ye are, an' no mistake. Mind what I'm tellin' ye. 'Tis made of the fresh palm juice."

His assertion of its powers was evidently not overdrawn, for before dusk fell, having invested eight annas, he had grown maudlin and affectionate. It was then that he confided to us that the path of the Indian halfbreed is rough and close hedged on either side. As night came on he beseeched us to bear him away with us, to the land where all men are equal, little wotting that, did such exist, it were no place for such will-less creatures as he. Our cheering words were unavailing and, as he waxed tearful and unendurable, we were constrained to bid him farewell and continue our journey to the northward.

BROOD *of the* EAGLE

By

CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

THE DRONING voice of the plane had come nearer, twice, in the cold fog of the Pacific between the redwood slopes, and then died away. Steve Gannett, rigger for the Hyampom timber crew, stopped on the creek trail among the towering boulders. Hoopa Joe stood breast high in the dripping ferns, watching the white man. Gannett, usually so cool, efficient, sure of himself, apparently was trying to control his twitching face against the Indian's stolid stare.

"We—better—go back—" muttered Gannett mechanically. "They ain't ever goin' to log a stick off that slope, Joe. No chance—"

Then came a sound that froze the words on the rigger's tight lips. The stillness of the Mendocino woods had been absolute. Not the stir of a squirrel, the flit of a bird in the gloomy lifeless redwood aisles, but now there was a faint distant crash.

The old dread struck to Gannett's soul. Voicelessly he was cursing Bill Lester of the Air Fire Patrol Service who must be the flyer lost in the fog above these tremendous trees. A fool, a crazy fool.

"All airmen are fools," Gannett's lips were muttering as Hoopa Joe watched him covertly.

"Hear 'um—big noise, then stop," grunted the Indian.

"Hear 'um, too," muttered Gannett listlessly. "Bad, Joe, bad."

He tried to steady his voice. That moan of the lost plane circling the valley of the giant trees with the cliffs peering through the mist at the pilot, then the distant jarring rip of fabric and metal—Gannett felt the tear of his own flesh with it.

The author of "The Man Who Cursed The Lilies" gives us a gripping tale of the redwood forests

The sheer forms of the great trees uprose like a barrier of brown spikes from the unbroken fern brakes, two hundred, three hundred feet to where the close tangled tops locked. From out that invisible roof, lost in the gray, a water drop would fall to strike the fronds with a vicious snap.

Height, space—that was what Steve Gannett feared, what he had come to the North California coast to conquer. Long months driving shattered nerves against danger, and now this lost airman had thrown him back again.

GANNETT wondered whether the Indian was guessing his sickness. Gannett, the newcomer to the redwood camps, had won his place. A queer bird, the bosses thought, taciturn, shunning his kind; but no high rigger in the slashes seemed more iron nerved. Not a man knew the agony it cost him to scale the big trees with belt and climbing spurs, to hang in his harness and lop the giant top from a two hundred foot stick where later the crews would raise the mighty blocks which would carry the steel cable through the slash. Grimly Gannett went at his perilous lone work, staring defiantly down at death so that he who had been conquered by the air should conquer the ghost of failure.

They didn't know of that crash on Kelly Field in Texas; that had ended his career as an Army flyer. Coming to earth in a whirl of fire and speed, with Corporal Kinzer behind him searing to a crisp, and then the long months of silence and dark till Gannett crept back to life.

Broken, shattered, retired from all he had known and loved, Gannett came to the Coast and took up this rigger's work

to win back his nerve. But he could not endure the sight or sound of a plane. That was why he had evaded Bill Lester, the Air Patrol flyer.

At the little landing field of the Fire Guard station back of the lumber camp, Lester used to watch the rigger curiously. There was a man who seemed to know his lingo, have a silent bond of understanding, and yet refused friendship with the Air Patrol of the big woods. Gannett rebuffed Lester curtly, and Bill was always trying to break through this mask.

Only Gannett knew what Bill had forgotten. Gannett was the crack flyer at Kelly Field when Lester was in ground school. But Gannett had changed. Bill couldn't recognize the lean, tight faced rigger as any one he had ever seen. He kept wondering why the rigger evaded him, turned his face away from the two ancient ships under the rough hangar sheds that the State provided for its wardens.

No luck making the stranger out, but then the timberjacks got no further with Gannett, either. The rigger wanted no friends. The grinning, swaggering hard boiled slash crews let him alone, and Bill, the airman, did the same. Nobody knew his secret fear.

Altitude, blind white space . . . Now, in the gloomy gorge of Madrona Creek, Gannett stood shaking with that old dread.

LESTER had crashed somewhere on these mighty rock walls above, or on the redwood slopes beyond. Wreckage, dead men, blazing oil . . . Gannett cringed at the feel and sight of it all. If he had been alone he would have dashed down the creek bed in a panic, anywhere to fight it out and control his twisting face.

But the Indian cruiser was watching him stolidly.

"Go find, mebbe. Upside, downside—trees ver' thick. Bad!"

Gannett stared abjectly at the dim columns of trees.

Bad? Only he knew how bad! That crazy fool had no chance. On the slopes there was not a spot thirty yards square that was not studded with redwoods which were old before Columbus sailed.

Gannett was raging within. For months he had been conquering fear and now Bill Lester had hurled him to the abyss of it. The dead man seemed leering from the gray space up the cañon.

The rigger turned irresolutely.

"No use, Joe. Might as well look for him at the bottom of the sea. No use—"

"Hear 'um?" said Hoopa Joe slowly. "There—up—"

Gannett twisted his lean hard hands. The rigger's gear and spurs on his shoulder pack clanked. But he heard a scream—far, savage, triumphant. It almost undid his tight nerves completely till he knew what it was—the cry of the gray eagles up there on the cliff faces where men would never log the scattered trees.

"By close—" muttered Joe. "We can go, boss. Up alongside."

But Joe made no move to go; he watched the white man. It was Gannett who turned from the creek rocks up through the black reek of a soil upon which the sun never fell. Ancient rotted stuff of the centuries on the slope. The redwoods here were not so gigantic as on the flats but even here nothing was to be seen but their sheer limbless heights slicing the white fog.

"Eagles," Gannett muttered. "Disturbed their roost. Nobody ever climbs there. Four hundred feet from the scarp of that rock to the flat. Timber above and below. What the hell was Bill doin' there, in this weather? No patrollin'. He must have gone crazy. Lost his nerve like—like—Keep on, Joe—travel. We can get a look, that's all; then go back and report it."

The guide led on half an hour till they were skirting the sheer rock face above the hidden valley. The ferns gave way to madrona thickets, fir and tanbark oak were among the thinning redwoods. The ground was rockier but clearer. Once Gannett stepped along what seemed to be a moss carpeted ridge of dirt and crashed

fifteen feet down in a rotted hole. A log fallen centuries ago and overgrown with lesser trees. The stump of it showed ahead like a gray green house. The two went about ancient pits where fires of long ago had hollowed out the root space of vanished trees. A forest of Wotan, Thor, the forgotten gods of the North and primal, inordinate things. A man now was no more than a rat crawling about their bases, unseeing and unseen.

Fit land for the eagles' brood. Once, rounding a spur of the cliff, a gray shape sailed out below them, fixed yellow savage eyes on them and vanished in the mist. Joe stopped to watch the flight. A scream came out of the white and chilled the rigger's heart.

The Indian watched Gannett closely.

"Know now—I seen 'um one time. Big tree on topside edge. No can go. Can find—he close to eagle nest. I see 'um once."

"Take a hundred men to beat out this timber," said Gannett. "No use. He all torn to hell, Joe. No use—"

"You friend?" put in Joe stolidly. "You leave 'um?"

Gannett cursed wildly. "My friend—no! A damn' crazy flyer! A lunatic—madmen, all of 'em—God, I know!"

THE GUIDE breasted on along the rocky ridge. The big timber thinned and the Pacific chill was wet on Gannett's cheek, streaming from another viewless gulf westward. He stopped near the cliff edge till Joe called to him. The eagle had screamed again beyond the madrona thickets. When Gannett went on he saw Hoopa Joe watching another dim clump of mighty trees down near the rimrock. A gray shape loomed over the cañon wall. It came along so close that Gannett saw the wet streak of feathers for an instant. The eagle turned wide fierce eyes toward him and was lost in mist.

The Indian's brown face lifted again toward the last clump of redwoods above the rock outcrop. Then he stole forward.

"What you see?" said Gannett. "No good, Joe. Dead, sure dead."

Joe blinked uncomprehendingly. The white man was flinching to follow toward the last stand of mighty trees. He was cursing and clutching his hands, hating himself and Lester too. The birdman had done this. Thrown him back, unstrung him by dying this way, whirled to death in the gray. Gannett had once stared at the gray earth rushing up to meet him when he and Corporal Kinzer fell to meet it, their ship a blazing comet. Why life was found in Steven Gannett not even the surgeons knew.

Hoopa Joe grunted. The white boss should lead now. High riggers of the redwood slashes are lead men. Picked, nervy, sinewy young men, highly paid and left to work out their own problems as they top the tallest trees, cling like cats with spurs and life belt against the bark and whirl with the mad gyrations when the vast branched dome of the redwood buckles and springs from the trunk after they have driven in the undercut. Nervy cool men who work with death at elbow, high and alone.

Joe was in doubt. This white man was mad certainly. Had seen nothing, felt nothing but he wore a mad fixed grin. They had come to the last stand of the big trees on the rock spur. A white gulf beyond. Suddenly Joe grunted, lifted a hand. Something had come out of the fog. A small shape that fell like a brown leaf.

It shifted lightly upon the thicket and Gannett stumbled to it blindly. He fingered tattered fabric.

"Look 'um, Joe. Piece of wing. That's bad. Hit that bunch of tops. Bad, two hundred and fifty feet up. On the edge of the rock—you look now. Look—I'm sick, Joe!"

The guide stared from his set face to the dim crown of the trees above. Far away the eagle screamed, and Gannett cursed.

They could do it, those birds—stare into the gray from height and space. Unfearing look down on the crown of trees.

Five mighty redwoods there were on this scarp of rock above the rim of the four hundred foot cliff, a sentinel guard that had faced the Pacific winds centuries before the Pilgrim fathers laid ax to the Plymouth oaks on New England's coast. Five smooth brown trunks sheering up limbless for hundreds of feet till their tops locked to form something like the nest of a monstrous bird of fable.

The smaller redwoods on the ridge were too distant, Gannett reasoned troubledly; that patch of wing stuff had floated from this somber nest. Hoopa Joe watched the wreathing mist before it and shook his head. These were other madmen who rode the air.

Gannett fingered the fabric, then turned listlessly. He hated to go on with this. Breasting the brush about the rocks around the redwood group, his feet dragged. The Indian mutely gave over leadership to the white man now that the search had ended. The rigger stole around the first redwood butt, a tree twenty feet in diameter; and looking up, from the other side, it was as a sheer wall that had no ending.

He went on to the next, ten yards beyond, crashed about its bulk and looked upward. Then he searched the tangle on the ground. There should be wreckage—human wreckage, also. But it might be scattered far over this slope or even down in the gulf below the rim. Gannett searched about them all, with Joe dogging his heels silently. The canopy top of the five giants was hardly visible in the fog above.

The rigger shouted. His voice seemed weak and fearful to his ears. It would be bad to have Bill Lester hear this. Bill would know he was frightened; though dead the airman's spirit would know Gannett had lost his nerve again.

Gannett could not shake off that fixed dead grin on Kinzer's burned face when they crashed on Kelly Field—the last thing he saw, and it flamed through his delirium for months. It had been with him all the two years of his fight to come back.

GANNETT now stole about warily in the brush afraid to find Bill Lester's body, Lester, the only man who understood him. Then Hoopa Joe called from the farthest tree of the group.

"Here—'um," he said stolidly. "Come see."

Gannett went that way. There was the crumpled twisted section of an airplane's wing half under the thickets. The rigger tugged at a broken strut, then let go. He was staring hard. This was not the ocher yellow of Bill Lester's wing spread. Back at the fire guard landing field Gannett had never gone closer to Bill's ship than he had to, but he knew this was not the Fire Patrol plane. He spelled out a segment of torn numbers in white upon dark brown fabric of what had been an under surface.

"H-24."

"Not Bill's," he stammered, and looked up.

Joe was scanning the mist whorls there. The gray sky was lightening a bit. The Indian muttered again and pointed. When Gannett joined him and followed Joe's steady finger, he too, made out a darker blot among the scanty leafed redwood tops.

Gannett backed away to where he might see more. His woodsman's eye calculated the height. Close to three hundred feet of sheer smooth cylindrical wood, this tree, the tallest of its group. The fog drops came straight down from the misty silence there.

Then Gannett backed away with a yell he could not repress. That biggest drop which struck his hand was red. A spatter of blood spreading across his hard knuckles.

Joe had not seen. Gannett wiped the stain away hastily. He was fighting hope and desperation. It wasn't Bill Lester then? That ought to let him out. In a way the Fire Patrol flyer had some sort of claim on him, even though Gannett had refused friendship.

He was the only man in the big woods who could have understood if Gannett

had told how he was trying to fight back. But this wasn't Bill who had tried to befriend him. Just some fool who must have got over to the grim redwood country from the Sacramento flying route from the Bay cities to Puget Sound. No matter how, he was a crazy fool and deserved what he got.

Gannett moved about restlessly, grumbling:

"The biggest stick of timber on this slope—that bird speared up there—well, he's out o' luck. If—if that damn' eagle hadn't hollered about here Joe and I would have gone back down the creek. No chance of findin' a guy on a blind hunt in country like this."

The Indian kept watching. Gannett wanted to snarl at him. More of this and the rigger would break. He felt it coming. Break like a woman, and Hoopa Joe would tell the tale to the grinning fallers, choppers, ringers, skid and tackle men who worked with steel and fire against the big trees. Joe would tell troubledly, but no drop of blood had smitten his hand from the sky as it had Gannett's, a secret signal from one flying man to another.

Suddenly he broke out irritably:

"Joe, you go. Back down creek. You tell 'um, Joe. Bring gang, tell big boss. Doctor, you catch 'um, too, Joe. Sawbones, tie up—you know. Stretcher—man hurt, mebbe dead. Carry out. Must do, see?"

Hoopa Joe nodded. This was white sense again. But this writhing white man must be mad. He shook and twisted and cursed. The Indian backed through the brush, then looked back briefly.

Then he disappeared in the foggy down trail. He had been gone ten minutes when Gannett started from the rock where he sat.

THERE had come the silent powerful beat of wings near him. That shape barely cleared the rock and sank away into the gray over the cañon wall. Gannett swore aloud at the eagle's flight.

A warning, a sinister threat for men to keep out of this viewless height and stillness. Gannett listened again and got up, slogging about in his hobnailed boots. He knew now why he had sent Hoopa Joe away. Fear. He feared to have the Indian see him break. That last look on Joe's face was strange.

He circled the great tree, then stopped. Blood was very close to a ridge of the butt, on the madrona leaves. Close to the trunk now. What did that mean? Was that voiceless man moving, crawling up there in the fog? Why didn't he cry out if he lived? No, he didn't live. He wasn't there; that wasn't possible. He had struck and gone over the cañon rim four hundred feet into the tops of mightier timber on the valley floor. Dead, vanished.

Still that blood spatter. But what could be done?

The rigger paced about. It was too still here. Pretty tough if that strange flyer was not dead. He began to mutter that if it were Bill he would do something. Bill might understand shaking fear. He thought of other flyers he knew in the old days. Great pals. Gannett had been cheery and reckless and cool, one of the best till the air broke his skull and sixteen other bones in his body. Doctors could patch everything except a man's soul. If a man could not do that for himself he was lost. Gannett had tried now, two years, to put courage, hope, fighting heart into his own.

Now, this crazy flying fool had crashed him down again. He cursed the luck that had dragged him into this mess.

Suddenly he went to laughing wildly. He had fooled that hard gang down at the camp. Came into the big woods a stranger and in a year won a topside place. Won it doing the thing that made him twist with fear every time he climbed a stick. Dogging himself to hang in mid air, staring down at the earth and the iron spiked forest while his fingers shook on the topping ax.

Big joke! The woodsmen thought he was a steel nerved high rigger!

Here he was weaving around this tree, shot to pieces.

"Must be bad up there," he grimaced. "That bird hangin' head down, maybe, in a twisted strap. Roastin', maybe, across his hot motor. Can't tell what's goin' on up in that fog. Why the hell don't he holler? Just groan—the damn' fool, he must be there drippin' blood. Settin' his teeth and facin' the game."

It was bad to think about. The eagle came again out of the gray gulf. Up and over silently, fixing beady eyes on the man, going up and on in wide spirals, first in sight then in the fog, on up till it vanished with a discordant shriek. Then the silence was worse. Was that a mocking jeer at the man who failed?

"Led us here," stammered Gannett, "that eagle did—and circles in and out, watchin' me. Damn him, he never crashed, never even thought he could crash. Lester and me know, every damn' fool that flies knows; but they fly—" he stared up the tree again. "I could climb her. Hang to the rags of my nerve and ride. Could— She's a mighty stick but riggers have crowned 'em. By God, I could! Alone, crazy scared, not a man below to keep my trail line clear, I could ride her to the top. That guy up there hangin' in his belt drippin' blood—maybe head down. An eagle cuttin' in and out past him. Cold meat in the end."

He went to pacing about the tree again, grumbling.

Kind of yellow to stick down here when some fellow was speared in the top of that redwood. Might be some bird he used to know. Gannett twisted off a leaf of blood smeared madrona.

"Hell!" he muttered. "I can't see nothin' here. I'll loop the old stick and do a hundred feet. That ain't much. I can see the ground and I can see up to where his bus is—maybe. I can holler him out, and if he don't answer I'll come down. No use shootin' myself to pieces over a guy that's passed out. Anyhow, still, like it is, I can't stand it waitin' for 'em to come."

SO HE worked slowly out of his pack and then strapped the climbing spurs to his legs. Then he got his rope about the tree above the giant wood ridges and hooked it to his broad life belt. Slowly, mechanically, with eyes boring to every strap and safety catch. It was a difficult start getting above the spread of the butt to where the hitch and throw motion of the rigger's rope began to clutch on the deep convolutions of the bark. Took half an hour to work to where the roundness of the tree gave him the slow regular ascent, leaving the coil of his light line on the ground.

Sixty feet up he lay back on the leather and listened. A white silent world. When he had doubled the distance the earth wreathed thick with fog puffs over the cañon rim. The blur of the redwood top became blacker, plainer. When he had made another hundred feet the first obstructing stub of a long gone branch made him hitch and crawl about till he drew the short ax and hacked it smoother. Then he leaned in his harness to left and gently lifted the slack to right above the stub. The leg spurs in the deep soft bark came up as the loop about the narrowing trunk was tightened yard by yard.

"Anyhow, I can't fall," he grumbled. "Not a chance. The gear's as safe and easy as sittin' in a rockin' chair. No, I can't fall, so what have I been scared about? For weeks, months, ever since I took up the work. No, I ain't scared. No—just altitude—"

Two hundred and fifty feet up the white bloom swept all about him. He saw neither the ground nor the tree top so near above him. The first flat spreading limbs would be reached—yes, he saw the first one now, not thirty feet above. A redwood limb which was big as an oak back East. Then others, crooked, gnarled, like giant fingers, locking to others from the lesser trees.

And suddenly Gannett felt himself trembling. He couldn't see any airplane wreckage from there. What had been left of the ship must have been catapulted all over the unseen thickets below,

anyhow, he thought. But the man was there! Blood sifting from the top three hundred feet to the redwood's base.

And under the first great limb Gannett stopped, paralyzed.

"By God, I never thought of this! It ain't like topping a stick. I got to get above that limb! Out of the belt and clear of the line! Hang like a cat in a crotch with nothin' to hold me!"

Funny he never though of that! A rigger on the job would sit back on spurs and belt and chop and saw the whole great top of a spar tree till it buckled and plunged. The tree would spring in mad whirls under the kick but the rigger could not be shaken off from spur and belt hold.

But this was different. His looped rope wouldn't pass the forty foot spread of limbs. He couldn't cut the top if he wanted to. That man was in it somewhere, perhaps far out on the branches, dangling, ready to plunge at a touch.

The rigger began to breathe thickly. His trail line hung from his belt down into the misty depths. He could hitch and back down himself safely enough as he must in the end, but that wasn't doing this unseen airman any good.

Gannett cursed futilely. Well, he could wait for relief. But some other riggers would have to take up this job. They could do no more than he was doing, only some cool head would have to devise a way to reach this victim of the forests. Do it while Gannett failed.

Gannett couldn't even see him yet. The two foot width of that first branch was like an umbrella over his head. He worked on his rope slowly to one side. Then he smelled something on his fingertips. Something that prickled his nostrils. Gasoline seeped into the deep bark flutes. Gas. How he hated and feared it!

HE COUGHED and gasped and then got a yard more into the white silence. Not till after a writhing struggle, with his spurred legs kicking the air, did he climb astride the first limb. Then he rested. This was the end of hitch and climb, the end of buckled safety about the round of the big tree. The best he could do was to tie himself into the branches but that was hardly the job ahead.

But Gannett didn't know what the job was. Nobody but a fool would have tried it alone, miles in the wilderness. Nobody but a shaken nerved fool who could not endure to be alone with his thoughts. Before he raised his eyes toward the blunt scarred head of the giant with its thin crown of limbs and scant leaves he looked down. The rope, with which he was wont to hoist his crosscut and the first light tackle, ran straight into the white. It had been a drag the last few yards, for it must all be out of coil. Two hundred and fifty feet dangling down the redwood. What good was that? Hanging a dead man at a rope end? What the fightin' hell had Gannett come up for, anyhow? He couldn't answer it.

He saw the broken metal that had been a motor, mashed wood around its wreckage. It couldn't have been an hour ago when the stranger crashed, for the stuff was still warm. Fifteen feet up from this crotch where it hung was the ancient splintered top with the twigs and sticks of the old eagle's nest dangling over the sides.

"Nothin' out on those bare limbs," muttered Gannett, "unless close around the crown out of sight. Nor in the other tops. I can see down into 'em all. Well, I'll ride this one clear up."

That was a climb. He could use his spurs but there was no rope encircling the trunk now to let him lean back in his broad strapped belt. Gannett had to find finger hold in ridges of old bark and smooth dead convolutions of wood. He would not, in the day's work, have mounted twenty feet from the ground without his safety rope. When he got where he could touch the loose sticks of the nest he flattened against the tapering crown and began to think of that. Nothing to hold him if his fingerhold broke.

The trail rope was fast to his belt and also to the limb below but if he went off

this would jerk him in two at the end of a killing plunge. He'd been too sick with crazy fear to think of making a shorter hitch. Crazy sick, that was it. Crawling up like a dumb machine, afraid to give his mind play about this terror that had gripped him so long. Altitude— Two years now, grimly hoping to rid himself of it, and now back in its clutch.

"That blood," he grunted. "There wasn't any—just another crazy notion—nobody up here. I was seein' things. I climbed like a fool. Damn him anyhow, a dead man leadin' me on!"

He cursed the unknown flyer aloud. Cursed himself when the loose sticks pulled away above his head.

He felt like cursing again as he snapped his chilled, sore fingers. Then he lay with back to the crotch of the limb and looked up at the drifty mist. What appeared from the ground like a close tangled top was here a sprawl of bare, mighty branches. The peak of the trunk itself was a weather worn crown of fluted wood four feet perhaps in diameter. The deepening mist wreathed about it like thin smoke. But Gannett stared hard at what lay in the nest of smashed wood where a broken limb projected.

WHAT had been the plane's motor was embedded there as if it had crashed like a bullet. A blur of mashed metal, fragments of which hung from the gap. On a far limb twenty feet out was a section of wing, dripping with damp. That was all.

The rigger's eyes roved about the crown.

"Tore him all to cat meat; broke everything loose." He turned to stare the other way out over the cañon rim hidden below. "Scattered into strings and bits."

He refused to look down in that white nothingness. The ground above the cliff itself was barely visible in the streaming fog. Here and there dim spires of fir and hemlock arose above the madrona thickets.

The loneliness and depth of it crashed on Gannett's soul up there in the silence with unseen tragedy. He hated to be the one who discovered this broken wreck of a man. He almost hoped the flyer had pitched out from the tree and vanished.

But that blood drip three hundred feet below. Gannett had to go on. Stand up on this crotch, unhook from the rope around the trunk and weave about, clutching the bark above the limb and search the redwood top.

Then he crouched down again and began to draw up his trailing gear line. He looped it over the limb, made the end fast and then began the climb to the crown of the big tree.

He was at this when he heard a slight snap, then a rush of air behind his neck. Gannett stopped and twisted around. That gray eagle was vanishing in the fog. It had driven in close to menace this intruder and then wheeled off silently.

"If it'd struck me a tap I'd been gone," the rigger muttered. "And I got to go on. Couldn't climb back on the spurs if I wanted to. That dead stuff breaks under 'em, and nothin' for my hands now—no rope—nothin'."

He got one hand under the big mass of the eagle's nest, thrust up till it found a ridge of wood. Testing this along till he was sure it was the rim of the hollowed crown, he jammed his bare head into the stuff, fought for another hand hold and dragged and pushed his body on up, crashing and worming until his middle lay across the solid wood. The dirtied sticks and twigs were over his head and he lay until his breath came back.

Then Gannett fought through a foot thick mass of old débris until he could lay out on it, twist about and stare up. White space above him again. On the very crown of the mighty tree. No rigger was ever called on to do that. A man would brace in his safe harness fifty feet below this top and undercut and saw the trunk till it toppled. Nervy boys these riggers, but they didn't work without being clamped and harnessed to safety.

Gannett sprawled in the nest, vaguely wondering what he had come for. Oh, yes, that blood trail he had followed!

But it had been useless. That bird had plunged long ago, for he was not in the redwood branches.

"I'm a damn' fool!" argued Gannett. "Put myself in this fix without usin' my nut. I could have seen he wasn't here. The gang'll have to get me down. I couldn't do it. Lost my nerve."

In a way they'd have the laugh on him. Gannett, reputed to be the grim, cold rigger of the camp, trapped in a top and taken down by better men, a chattering fool. The end of his job all right. The company wouldn't put a man up the big sticks who cracked on the job. The lives of the high line men who came after a rigger made the first tackle hitch on a spar tree depended on what the rigger did on his first lone work aloft.

"They watch us guys close," muttered Gannett. "You got to show stuff all the time. To hell with the job. I'm through! They'll have to blindfold me and lower me away in a chair, let me sneak away. The big trees got to me, and I cracked."

Bad stuff for a man who hoped to come back. Well, a plane was a joke to this. If a man were going to crash, three hundred feet was as bad as three thousand.

AFTER awhile when his heart stopped thumping, Gannett wormed up clear of the matted nest. It was nothing but wet sticks, leaves and dirty feathers and an acrid smell where birds of prey had torn their quarry to pieces for their young. Gannett felt about for the solid wood under it, then rolled about to his knees. He would not look off to space. In one spot of the valley the fog was drifting thin, he could see a thousand feet out and down to the dark timber crests but he dared not. It would be too easy to jump and follow that flyer to death on the cañon rim.

He fumbled around to feel the edges of this four foot perch. The crown had been weather hollowed centuries ago. Safe here, if he stuck to the middle of the broken nest, and he sure would.

He began to laugh wildly. Safety? He sure would! The rest of his life, if he got out of this! He wouldn't climb to the top of a bunkhouse after this crazy spree alone in the big woods.

Gannett raised his head with this laugh. Then it died on his lips. From the other side of the tangled mass, so close that he could have touched them, wide open eyes were staring at him. The same unblinking look of the eagle brood. Human eyes, a human face, drawn, gray under its tan, but watching him silently.

Gannett yelled and swung to his feet upright, but weaving about uncertainly. A blood streaked face that never moved. The body was curved down in the broken sticks, but now a hand did twitch slightly on the breast of a flyer's suit.

The rigger stared back, trying to voice his incredulity.

"Bill," he quavered at last. "You—Bill? What the hell?"

A fixed grin answered him. Bill Lester, wide eyed and staring. Gannett slumped down and seized Bill's arm. Bill couldn't move it. Not this one. The right hand wiggled warning fingers.

"You, Bill? Speak to me. God Almighty, Bill!"

Lester managed to shake his head. Then Gannett saw a bloody scrap of paper on Bill's side. The fingers of that one hand which could move had been trying to write on it. The stub of a pencil and the notebook leaf which Bill must have managed to get from his pocket shoved closer to Gannett's own hand.

The rigger picked this up and studied the scrawls. It was pretty hard to make out, but Gannett began to repeat the words.

"Jaw broken—left arm, too, eh? Bill, you can't talk? Old boy, you're a mess. Paralyzed, Bill?"

If Lester nodded it was too slight to notice. His worn eyes blinked slowly. He wanted the paper again. Gannett held it under his fingers and the airman was scrawling letters again.

Came into this trying to clear the rim. Side-slipped. Caught on the big limb . . . something held me out the mess. You, Gannett?

Bill Lester was trying to ask him something. Gannett began to pour out wild words. He had to explain himself and Bill also.

"Blood down there, Bill. You didn't strike in this crown. You got here, somehow—from a limb. How's that? Crippled?"

Lester could nod a response. Projecting from the opposite side of the crown, Gannett saw a fifteen foot limb with bits of cloth and straps in its smashed branches. It was from that perch out over space that the blood had fallen. The airman had torn into this yielding mat when the plane crashed full on the crotch below the crown. That was plain, and then he had worked along to the nest of sticks and collapsed.

One arm broken and body all but useless, he had crawled to the only safety and slumped down. When Gannett raised his shoulders Bill went on writing, making curious little noises from the torn cartilages of this throat and wagging a fallen jaw in a grin that seemed almost joyous.

Wanted to drop a message. Saw no hope they'd find me. Eagle meat when I passed out. Rotten show to put on.

Gannett yelled at him:

"The damn' birds put on the show! They put up a racket. Otherwise we'd not climbed the cañon. Bill, we're in a jam!"

Not so bad (wrote Bill) Cigaret—got one?

Gannett was grinning.

"Old stuff, hey? Nothin' yellow, eh? Can you hold this smoke in your face when I light it?"

Bill did that between bloody lips. Then he smiled. But the look on his face was an odd question. Gannett got the meaning.

"I'm the bird that lost his nerve after that—you know that Kinzer business? Back in Texas. Didn't have the guts to look at a ship. Well, here we are!"

HE WORMED about on the sticks. Leaned over the edge and stared down in that white drift. The ground might have been five miles away by the dim shapeless look of it. Gannett began to drag up his line from the first limb where he had left it looped.

Then he was unbuckling the broad seat straps of his rigger's harness. He worked the leather around under Bill Lester's body.

"Just to make it right, Bill," he muttered, "but you can't tumble, Bill. Not with this gear on you—yeh, safe as in bed. I don't need it. Old Swen and some of those high workers'll be up soon. Have a tackle up here that'll slip you down easy. A damn' rigger never gets out of his gear and climbs a crown, but they'll do it. I did—" his voice trailed off till he stopped its shaking.

"I did—funny thing, now. To hell with altitude! Look here, now! Something broke out of my brain this trip!"

The Fire Patrol flyer's eyes grew wild then at what Gannett pulled. He stood straight up on the rim of the crown and kicked the wreck of the eagle's nest off this way and that. He walked around and kicked at the rest. There was a a seethe of heavy wings and one of the warrior birds loomed into the gray, snapped fierce eyes down and then vanished.

Gannett stood steadily with the toes of his hobnailed boots projecting over the crown and stared after it. He followed the eagle's flight far as he could see it, then waved his arms and said quietly.

"Bill, the gang's comin'. Through the madrona, I can see 'em. Sort o' dim, but six of 'em. Tackles and everything. Doc Asher'll be with 'em—and a stretcher to get you down the creek. Good thing I'm on the crown. That last fifty feet o' this stick would be hard to dicker with. No safety belt on a guy, you see."

The broken jawed man gurgled what he meant for words. His eyes were wide on Gannett who seemed boasting after all the surly close mouthed months on the upper Trinity. A trace of apprehension

came to the helpless flyer, Something was wrong with this timber rigger who now stood balanced on the rim of wood and yelled at the gang three hundred feet below him. He faced the white gulf over the cañon wall as well and gave his orders when a skid boss shouted back at him bewilderedly.

"It's a job for Swen, Kelly! Hurry up and have him bring a line to piece out my gear. This crown is fifty feet up from the first stub, and I got to swing this bird down to where Swen can hitch the tackle to lower him. That's all. Nothin' to it."

Men were breaking the brush around the redwood butt. The two men on the crown heard the clank of iron and muttered voices.

Kelly, the boss, asked nothing. He didn't tell riggers how to work. But he grumbled to the camp doctor.

"Hoopa Joe said Gannett had gone' blooey. Don't look like it, him workin into that top this way. A mighty bad stick up there. Mighty hard to ride with no gear on. Gannett, a guy livin' on his nerve like he does . . ."

Gannett heard part of their talk. So did Bill Lester. He nodded, and then resumed his slow scrawl on the bloody notebook pages:

Little more feeling in my legs now. Thanks. Haven't I seen you somewhere before?

"Kelly Field," retorted Gannett. "God Almighty, don't thank me! You pulled me back, Lester. I lied to you down at the station. What you doin' above the big timber in this fog?"

Brought a new ship for the station from Sacramento. Clear this morning over the range. (wrote Bill doggedly) Tried to get down to the field when I saw it once through the fog.

"Then it closed in on you? That little rotten patch o' clearin' at your station ain't much of a landin' anyhow, Bill. You had to get out of the valley sure if you missed it. But where were you climbin' to?"

Bill painfully shook his head. He might have flown over to the flats of Humboldt Bay and taken a chance there if he could have found them in the white tumble of clouds on the Coast range. But Gannett asked him no more. Lester checked the moans when Gannett dragged him from the nest and snubbed his rope about the top.

SWEN, the Hyampom rigger, got to the first crotch fifty feet below the crown. He and Gannett conferred about this. Bill could be swung in the rigger's belt down to where Swen had a rope and tackle hitched to the limb, and the rest was easy.

But when Gannett lowered his man over the crown Bill's questioning eyes came up.

"That's all right," said Gannett. "I'll do a monkey climb after Swen when he lowers you away with the tackle. Nothin' to it."

He sat cross legged on the crown alone till a shout arose from the ground. The flyer was rolled in blankets on the canvas stretcher when Swen yelled up at Gannett.

"I'll send a belt up to you, man. Pull up on the line when I'm down."

"Keep movin' or I'll spike you with them spurs o' mine," retorted Gannett. "I'm comin' hand over fists on your damn' rope."

"You got nerve," grumbled Swen. "Fer me I feel easier with a hitch around the stick. Mebbe you're in a hurry though."

Gannett had to wait in the big crotch below till the other rigger was down. Nobody paid attention to him as he slipped along the rope, hand and hand, his spurs taking the wooden wall for a part of his weight.

Timberjacks were not given to criticism but they wondered why a man would want to punish his hands by three hundred feet of sodden rope which would be left hanging to the stick to rot in the sea fogs up here where timber could not be logged on any account.

The doctor's outfit had the stretcher jogging slowly down the rock trail when

Gannett overtook it. He asked a question.

"I shot him full of hypo," said the doctor bluntly. "We got twists in this path where we'll have to double him up to get down. Hell of a place to land a plane in. Or find one. How'd you spot it?"

"The birds take care of their own," grinned Gannett. "And so Bill'll come right after a few months, will he, Doc? That's great. I'll call in that Eureka hospital on my way out and thank him."

The old camp sawbones was a hard-boiled lot himself.

"Thank him? Gannett, you're a damn' fool going after him alone. Here, have a drink to pull together a bit."

"No thanks," said Gannett. "I never felt better. Yeah, Bill Lester knows. I'm goin' back to where I left off. Nothin' much to explain about. I can't understand it all myself."

The APPEARANCE of EVIL

by F. R. Buckley

IT WAS inadvisable to commit a crime in Florence during the Fifteenth Century, when a judge's first thought was of the gallows, with red hot pincers to make the journey thither more interesting. But it was even less advisable to be suspected of criminal intentions, as may be seen in the case of a certain hermit, who on the 27th of September, 1481, went to the house of Lorenzo de' Medici.

> The servants, (writes Lucio Landucci, who kept an apothecary's shop in Florence at the time) declared that he intended to murder Lorenzo, so they took him and sent him to the Bargello, where he was put to the rack.

What else he was put to, Landucci does not say; probably something mild but continuous, for the hermit did not die until October 15th. It was said, however, that the soles of his feet had been flayed and then thoroughly roasted at a fire, after which the suspect had been set upright and forced to walk across the great hall. And after all this trouble—and the patient's death—"opinions were divided as to whether he was innocent or guilty."

Sometimes such little matters were attended to without the assistance of judge, fire, or rack; as witness the incident of San Giovanni's day, in 1488. A man from Bologna was caught cutting tassels from the garments of people at Mass, and was immediately hanged from a window; it would seem without due process of law. This would not have been so bad, on some other day; but as it was, the outraged saint caused a tempest of rain, hail and wind to descend on the city, and particularly to tear up and destroy the awnings of the Piazza di San Giovanni; which were of blue embroidered with gold lilies, and cost money.

The prudent men, like Landucci, were disgusted.

> The people (he says) were in rather too great a fury; they might have waited for another day. And it was impossible to run the horseraces that evening.

The JOCULAR PILGRIM

By
BERTRAND W.
SINCLAIR

A bronco-busting tenderfoot who made two laughs grow where but one grew before

IN THE strict sense of the word a pilgrim is one who journeys afar to some shrine for the good of his soul—or other men's souls. He may be an humble wayfarer; or he may go forth with banners and lances, prepared to do battle upon the unbeliever. He is however always a traveler in strange places. Consequently it is to be supposed that he will be unfamiliar with the modes, manners, customs and beliefs of peoples among whom his journeyings may bring him. And it is not recorded that the pilgrims of any time, ancient, medieval or modern, suffered the burden of a sense of humor. The Crusaders were not prone to laughter.

Probably the range riders of the northwest were familiar with these facts. The cowpuncher did have a sense of humor—a little broad in spots. He was given to horseplay and Homeric laughter. The nature and stress of his calling alone perhaps saved him from becoming an outlaw or a misanthrope, because he worked at a hazardous calling for small pay, at top speed, taking desperate chances sometimes in sheer loyalty to his job. However, he had it. He could laugh in the teeth of bad horses, heat, dust, rivers in flood, and all manner of untoward events.

And those who did not or could not ride and laugh with him he considered tenderfeet; and one of his synonyms for tenderfoot was "pilgrim".

This, as it happens, is the tale of a pilgrim with a funnybone. Though his

humor doubtless was misplaced he provoked laughter, reveled in grotesqueries, and like all who make two laughs grow where only one had flourished, he received his reward in the end.

MIKE STRATTON came jingling down a fork of Serviceberry with the last of that spring day's sun making the shadow of his horse slant far before him. To right and left a pair of riders flanked him. Before them a bunch of Half Moon saddlehorses fled like antelopes, wild as hawks with six months' freedom.

They turned a bend, slowed up at sight of fluttering tents, wagons, smoke from a supper fire, men walking about, all the muster of a roundup. Wherefore these high stomached Half Moons lifted their heads still higher, nickered to their fellows and trotted to join the saddle bunch grazing under the watchful eye of the wrangler, their equine intelligence apprising them that winter holidays were over.

Mike and his riders unsaddled by the rope corral, stalked over to the chuck tent to eat a belated supper. As they passed the bed wagon Mike's gaze took in a figure, a gaudy figure, perched on the wagon tongue among the harness, where no cowpuncher ever sat in his hour of ease.

If the man had come into a roundup camp wearing spats, a monocle, a cutaway coat and a derby he could not have better advertised his unfamiliarity with the range than he did by wearing everything that any range rider ever wore, anytime, anywhere. He was like a woman wearing an elaborate afternoon dress to a country picnic. Mike needed only a glance. He saw it all with a faint grin of amusement—wide brimmed Stetson, bright blue neckerchief, black silk shirt, stiff bat-wing chaps, boots with exaggerated heels, spurs with enormous rowels, a Colt in a much stamped holster—all creaky, shiny new, loud, cheap. You got them with two dozen 4X coffee coupons. A mail order stockhand!

Mike noted Johnny Robb's derisive stare. Mike said nothing. He was newly appointed range boss of the Half Moon; he was not much more than a boy himself, younger perhaps than the imitation range rider on the wagon tongue. Yet he was in charge of a big outfit, and a roundup boss has both dignity and authority to maintain. But a joke was a joke. Mike and Johnny Robb exchanged comprehending glances. They lifted a mutual eyebrow.

Mike and Johnny and Dave Hunt squatted inside the cook tent with plates in their laps. The cook hovered over them paternally. He was a thick waisted man of forty, who had been feeding cowboys for many years and took a decent pride in his work.

"Reckon it done escaped from somebody's Wild West show?" he asked the world at large.

"Uh-uh," a rider who had come in to get a drink answered him. "That there's a cowboy. You better speak respectful of cowpunchers, you darned old pot wrassler, or you're liable to get shot in the paunch with one of your own biscuits."

"That," Dave Hunt remarked, "would sure be fatal."

The cook grinned. The three finished their supper, chucked their plates into the dishpan and rolled cigarets. A rider or two lounged in. With the sun gone, a chill came to the evening air and the sheet iron cookstove gave out a pleasant warmth.

"How did it come to camp?" Johnny Robb inquired. "Walk, swim, or fly? Does it talk or just make signs?"

"It's part human," his neighbor responded. "Dumped itself off the Landusky stage this afternoon an' walked into camp packin' a stock saddle on its back. Sure a gaudy pilgrim."

THE FLAP of the chuck tent lifted and the gaudy pilgrim came diffidently in, innocent eyed, a lamb, had he but guessed, offering himself to the slaughter, despite the .45 on his hip.

His age was anywhere between twenty and twenty-five. His face bore little

mark of wind and weather; it was rosy and round. Otherwise he was rather undersized and, except for the decorative details of his costume, he would have passed anywhere without comment.

But he had overdressed the part. In the eyes of these very practical young men the effect was ludicrous, a matter for sport. He was a Little Lord Fauntleroy fallen among ribald schoolboys.

Over the pilgrim's shoulder an impish, brick red countenance grinned and bestowed a wink on Mike Stratton. Dick Burgess, nineteen, range bred, competent to rope, throw and hog tie a steer in record time, able to ride anything in the shape of a horse, garbed plainly in overalls and a blue serge coat, steered the pilgrim.

"There's the boss," said he.

"I heard in Malta," said the pilgrim, "that the Half Moon was startin' roundup. So I come out to see if I could get a job. I'd like to ride on roundup."

"What for?" Mike asked gravely. "Only fellers that's hidin' from the sheriff or ain't able to get a job tendin' bar, wants to ride roundup."

"Well," the pilgrim seemed slightly abashed, "I want to be a cowboy."

"Ain't you?" Mike asked.

The pilgrim shifted uneasily from one high heel to the other. Johnny Robb gazed at him solemnly. They all did, for a minute.

"Oh, he would be a cowboy and with the cowboys stand,
With leather chaps upon his legs and a six-gun in his hand.
A long rawhide riata,
A big Colt .45.
He'll make a noble cowboy as sure as you're alive."

Johnny recited this in a drone, without inflection, as if it were a dirge. Johnny's doggerel evidently put Mike's query aside. The pilgrim looked doubtful. Mike Stratton didn't need the question answered anyway. All at once he felt a little sorry for this palpable tenderfoot whose capacity was nowise equal to either his ambition or his costume. No roundup boss conducts a range kindergarten. The scope of a roundup's activities requires every man to be a cog meshing smoothly with every other cog. Mike Stratton had twenty riders and forty thousand cattle to handle. His men had to know their business. A bit of luck, manifest courage, competence and honesty had but recently put Mike in charge of the Half Moon. He had his own spurs to win, in a sense.

"If all the boys that promised turn up, I'll be full handed," he said kindly, "but you can stay with the wagon for a spell, if you like. Somethin' might turn up."

What Mike really meant was that some ranch job might offer—or the pilgrim could get a ride back to town. But the pilgrim brightened, thanked Mike and withdrew to the bed tent, where he listened, wide eared, to a crossfire of talk that was largely for his benefit. Seldom the Lord delivered so tender a morsel into their hands. They would have shared blankets and money with the pilgrim in trouble, but he was manna in the way of diversion.

THE HALF MOON was picking up the last of its loose saddle stock off the open range. In a week they would foregather with the Circle Diamond, the Ragged H and the YT. Over a land where new green thrust like a velvet pile up through matted, winter bleached grass, they would sweep from creek to creek, from ridge to ridge, making the spring roundup to mark the calves. There would be wild riding from dawn to dusk, swishing ropes, hot irons, sweat and strain and haste around branding fires under a blazing sun.

Mike settled in his blankets thinking of this, forgetful of the gaudy innocent who would be a cowboy. But he was reminded of him as the crew gathered for breakfast. The pilgrim gobbled his food like the rest, but he left his plate, tin cup, knife and fork where he ate instead of putting them in the dishpan. The cook grunted as he walked over to pick them up. Later, in the chill gold and

pink of sunrise when horses were being caught and harnessed for chuck and bed wagons the pilgrim stood by, patently at a loss, the only man of all sixteen who was not moving with speed and certainty to some necessary task.

Tents down, everything stowed, teams ready, they caught their mounts. Mike recalled that the pilgrim was afoot. But he had a saddle.

"Catch him a horse," he commanded Johnny Robb.

Mike neglected to specify what kind of horse, and Johnny used his own judgment. Johnny had been with the Half Moon two seasons; he knew every horse in the remuda. Out of three score mounts as yet unallotted to riders Johnny had considerable choice. Mike had a momentary misgiving when he saw the pilgrim cinching an ancient Gallup and Frazier double rig on a sleepy eyed bay, a very model of equine docility. The pilgrim might get his back dusted, but he couldn't get hurt on that soft ground. And it was no part of a wagon boss' duty to protect greenhorns from practical jokes.

The two wagons rolled off, tooled by the cook and the nighthawk. The saddle bunch strung out on the trail. Last of all, the cowpunchers began to mount. Johnny Robb edged over beside Mike. So did Dick Burgess, red headed, anticipatory. The gentlest cow horse is apt to pitch on a chill spring morning.

The two cowboys paid no attention to sundry leaps and plunges and mild cursings at other points. They kept watch of the pilgrim, as he put his foot in the stirrup and swung up on the mild looking bay.

With the weight of a man in his middle the bay woke up. He took three or four quick, mincing steps, shook his head fretfully and bounced, stiff legged, his head down and his back arched like an angry tomcat.

Whereupon he and the pilgrim parted company.

By some strange defiance of the law of gravity the pilgrim described a graceful parabola in the air, turned clear over and alighted squarely on his feet. And there he stood, the beet red of deep shame mounting in his round cheeks, while the bay horse stood a little aside, quite tranquil, simulating astonishment, as a broken cowpony sometimes does when he throws a man.

"You done darned well," Mike said encouragingly. "There ain't another man in the outfit could 'a' dismounted as graceful as you did, pilgrim. Keep his head up. Hold your reins tight. He won't likely buck again, anyhow."

THE SAME ribald streak that sends titters through a crowd when some portly citizen steps on something slippery and sits down on the sidewalk sent snickers through the Half Moon riders. The bewildered expression on the pilgrim's face did not abate their mirth.

The pilgrim gingerly approached the bay once more, gathered up his reins, put his foot in the stirrup. Once more the mild mannered brute set out at a sedate trot with a dozen lusty voices advising the pilgrim to hold up his head. And again the bay leaped suddenly straight into the air, this time with a loud derisive snort.

Only this time the pilgrim did not part company with his gyrating mount. True, he lost everything, including his presence of mind. His reins flew. His big hat sailed off like a kite. His ample neckerchief climbed up over his chin and muffled his parted lips as his head snapped back and forth. But he stayed somewhere on top, while the bay horse bucked with extreme earnestness.

Both the pilgrim's feet were out of his stirrups. His hands clawed at mane, saddlehorn, wherever he could get hold. He got crosswise of his saddle, once behind the cantle. By all the rules of the game he should have been thrown a dozen times. He was all but thrown a dozen times. Yet somehow, he managed to stay, more or less, on top of that nine hundred pounds of violently agitated horse, until the end, with every man

rocking in his saddle and bellowing:

"Stay with him, kid! Spur him in the flank! Ride 'im, cowboy, ride 'im!"

The bay stepped on a trailing rein, giving himself a savage jerk with the spade bit and stopped short, panting with his useless exertions. The pilgrim, puffing also, gathered up his reins, put his feet in the stirrups and gazed about.

"He didn't throw me that time," he said triumphantly.

"The best riders gets dumped off once in a while," Johnny Robb declared. "You certainly rode him, pilgrim. You're a rider an' a good 'un."

"Oh, I'm not really, though," the pilgrim explained. "I never rode a horse like that before."

"Darn seldom anybody ever did make a ride like that," Red Burgess assured him gaily. "You done darned well."

And that little gleam of admiration for the fellow who takes a sporting chance where he knows he is outclassed eventually put the pilgrim on the Half Moon payroll. Mike shrewdly observed him for three or four days. The pilgrim was never downcast. He had a damnable persistence. He would do anything he was asked to do, and the wags of the Half Moon asked him to do a number of things—all of which, when he discovered the humorous intent, he accepted good naturedly.

THE ROUNDUP moved north to the railroad, into the town of Saco, to stock with grub. Here they were joined by three other outfits. And when Mike found himself still short handed he put the pilgrim to work.

"He will learn," Mike said to Johnny Robb. "He's the kind that does. Meantime he will do to chase cattle and relieve somebody on day herd an' such."

"He's the funniest cuss I ever saw," Johnny confessed. "He sure admires them fancy trimmin's he wears. An' he thinks he's all set to be a broncho fighter since he managed to stay on that old crow hopper."

"You couldn't ride Bay Billy," Mike pointed out, "even by main strength an' luck, like he did."

"I'm a cowpuncher, not no rough rider," Johnny replied. "I take 'em gentle, or not at all. Let them that wants ride outlaw horses."

The pilgrim, it seemed, nursed that ambition. He had one primary qualification, too. He was afraid of nothing in the shape of a horse. Johnny Robb said he didn't know enough to be scared. But he was the most awkward man in four roundup crews. Husky calves dragged bawling to the branding fire tramped on the pilgrim, skinned his knuckles, butted him down. When he went to catch a horse the breadth of his loop and the scope of its swing kept everybody else out of the corral. He was a holy show and he furnished those capable young men with all sorts of diversion.

Yet Mike Stratton took note that the pilgrim, for all his awkwardness, for all his inexperience, despite the fact that he would innocently do any fool thing any cowpuncher suggested, made a tolerably useful hand. If he seemed always on the point of falling off a horse, he never did, or at least seldom, and he never let a horse get away from him. If he were thrown he crawled aboard at once, with a grin. Many a horse piled him off once. Not one threw him a second time; so Mike observed, if the others didn't. He didn't lose cattle out of the day herd. He managed to get by on night guard. In fact, he might ultimately become as good a stockhand as any, Mike reflected, if he would only get over being such a credulous fool.

But he would never be a rider, in the range sense of being able to ride anything. Few cowpunchers could—perhaps three out of every roundup crew. Mike himself could. So could Dick Burgess.

A new man joined the Half Moon at Saco. He was a rider too, a good one. He liked the distinction of riding bad horses. Burgess and this Frank Dodd rode all the bad horses in the outfit—bad because they would invariably buck when mounted. If they could throw a

man, they would throw him as fast as he got on. If they couldn't, they forebore bucking and were as good as any other cowhorse, with the merit of being tough as whalebone for long rides.

Those were the horses the pilgrim wanted to ride. Mike let him try—on a sober scale. That is he gave him two or three mounts in his string that would pitch a dozen jumps or so when they were saddled on a nippy morning. And the pilgrim rode them as he rode Bay Billy, in a fearful and wonderful fashion. None of them ever threw him twice.

The Half Moon praised his riding extravagantly. Mike frowned on this. He didn't want the pilgrim spoiled. But he couldn't say anything. The cowpuncher was no ox to be muzzled. Mike had hope of the pilgrim's becoming a useful hand around cattle. As a rough rider he would be a total loss. Mike knew. So did his men. But sport was sport. The pilgrim was all too eager to be butchered to make a range holiday.

FRANK DODD, the last of the new men to join the Half Moon, expressed himself to Mike one day about the pilgrim's horsemanship.

"You know that darned fool will make a rider some day," he declared. "He's strong as a bull in the legs. He's game."

"Not in a thousand years," Mike snorted. "An' it's a crime to rib him up to it. A bad horse would pile him in two jumps. He rides like a sack of meal."

"I dunno," Dodd said thoughtfully. "I seen him at the Capital K horse ranch a week or two before he lit out for the Half Moon. He come there lookin' for a job. They had some fun with him. Give him two or three to ride. He rode 'em. You take notice. He's awkward as sin, but he stays in the middle of 'em."

"Yes. Crow hoppers. If he could ride for a horse outfit, why didn't they keep him?" Mike inquired.

"Aw, shucks, a green man is plumb useless to a horse outfit," Dodd replied. "He didn't know beans. They want broncho fighters ready made."

"He'll never be one," Mike maintained. "He'd make a cowpuncher if you fellers would quit feedin' him taffy about his ridin'. He's beginnin' to think he can."

"By gosh, I believe he can, m'self," Dodd persisted.

Dodd himself could ride anything. Moreover he was a smart man anywhere around a herd, and a smooth roper. But his opinion didn't carry weight with Mike Stratton.

Mike tried to head the pilgrim off.

"You quit this givin' ridin' exhibitions for the boys, pilgrim," he said kindly one day. "You're liable to get hurt. Besides, I hired you for punchin' cows. Ridin' bad horses is not your long suit—not with the Half Moon, anyway."

With which Mike ceased to bother about the pilgrim's horsemanship. The general roundup, of which the Half Moon was an important part, swung over the plains north of Milk River, hauled south to the Larb Hills, west through the Little Rockies, farther west till the Bear Paw Mountains stood up above them like the teeth of a giant saw. Then they swept across the flat reach of the Gros Ventre reservation, sorting out and branding calves by the thousands, until at last the dust and heat and press of spring roundup ended on the sagebrush flats by Saco two days before the Fourth of July.

IN THEIR pleasant camp on the bank of Milk River, loafing in the shade of leafy cottonwoods, they caught up on lost sleep and talked about the Fourth of July celebration.

And the pilgrim, ludicrous in his enormous hat which had gone floppy in the brim from the spring rains, in his bat winged chaps without which he seemed to think himself unclad, mourned because he could not rope well enough to take part in the tying down contest for which a saloonkeeper offered a hundred dollar prize. Nor was he skillful enough to bulldog a steer, which would also return profit and glory. Neither had he a sprinting cow pony to match against any other quarter horse.

"The damn' fool thinks he will go in the rough ridin' contest, though," Johnny Robb said to Mike Stratton. "Ain't he the choicest in captivity?"

Johnny quivered with mirth. The pilgrim had never really seen bad horses in action. The Fourth of July contest, for which some townsmen had put up two hundred and fifty dollars in gold and a beautifully stamped Menea saddle would bring out the best riders and the worst horses in a region noted for both.

Every cow outfit, every big horse ranch, had outlaw horses. They were, so to speak, a by-product of the range business, useless for anything but Wild West exhibitions. They were outlaws, but not because no man could ride them. The range bred riders who could ride anything. But when a horse for any reason got the habit of bucking high, wide and handsome in an effort to throw his rider, that horse went into the discard. And every outfit owned such horses. The Half Moon, the Ragged H, the YT had in their remudas horses gentle to handle, to saddle, handsome brutes with spur and saddle marks on them. But they were never used for range work. They were never saddled except on a bet, to make a braggart prove that he *could* ride.

These were the beasts that rough riders would mount in the contest. They would pitch high and hard and fast and crooked till they threw their riders, or stopped from exhaustion. And when the Half Moon outfit contemplated the pilgrim crawling aboard one of these snaky brutes they snickered in their separate sleeves.

THE FOURTH dawned cool and still on the Saco flats, all yellow with ripe grass between clumps of gray sage. Meadowlarks caroled in that fresh, sweet hour when the sunbeams were hunting shadows out of the low ground. By noon the earth would crackle with midsummer heat, and dust would rise in sharp puffs wherever a hoof struck ground. But neither heat nor dust made much difference to cowboys at work or on a holdiay. They were used to both. By night some of them would be broke, some drunk, all happy. In that pleasant hour as they rode from camp where the tents fluttered in a morning breeze and the dew was scarcely gone, they looked forward with eagerness to a big time.

"Pilgrim," Mike said as they dismounted before the Ark for a drink to start the day. "keep outa that ridin' contest. Maybe you'll be a rider some day, but you're outa luck in this show."

"Oh, I dunno," the pilgrim answered loftily.

"I'm tellin' you so you will know," Mike replied.

He said no more. He was no guardian of fools who *would* rush in. He knew the cowpunchers would egg the pilgrim on to folly. And since Mike had a kindly feeling for this extremely verdant young man he quietly put a bug in the ear of the committee in charge of the rough riding, and they agreed to bar the pilgrim for his own good.

Neither the committee nor Mike nor Johnny Robb was prepared for the roar the pilgrim emitted when he was not allowed to ride. He had taken a drink or two and he was noisy in his grief. He proclaimed to all and sundry that the Menea saddle and the two hundred and fifty dollars gold was his except for a conspiracy. He was a rider and a stranger and they were afraid of him.

Curiously, he had the moral support and open sympathy of Frank Dodd, who had suggested to Mike that in spite of his awkwardness the pilgrim really could ride. Dodd was lit up like a Christmas tree by then and no one paid much attention to either of their offers to bet money on the pilgrim's horsemanship.

The roping, the quarter horse races and the bulldogging came off on schedule, and the victors covered themselves with dust and sweat and glory. At three in the afternoon the bad horses were led in and saddled one by one to do their stuff before a hilarious audience. The Menea saddle and the purse went to a Rolling M man

from the Larb Hills. That was the climax of a perfect day and the crowd turned to the saloons.

ABOUT five o'clock Johnny Robb came grinning to Mike Stratton.

"All right with you if I go get Nigger White, Mike?" he asked.

"Why, yes," Mike answered. "But what the dickens you want with him?"

"The pilgrim's goin' to ride him right here in the street," Johnny burbled. "He's bet me fifty dollars he can fan him to a fare you well."

"It's a crime," Mike protested.

"Oh, I'll give him back his money," Johnny chortled. "But he's hell bent to ride. Be some fun."

Nigger White was a bay Half Moon horse with a reputation from the Flathead to the Dakota line. There were men who had ridden him, but few who hankered to ride him twice. He wasn't vicious. He didn't bite, kick, strike, or throw himself backward. But he could buck. Yea and verily! He weighed eleven hundred. He had the speed and activity of a thoroughbred and the staying qualities of a mustang. He had never been ridden outside of a three hundred yard radius since he was a four year old and threw a negro broncho twister over the top of a ten foot corral—and the colored brother's face when he picked himself up was what gave the bay horse his name.

"Why, the damn' crazy fool!" Mike said disgustedly.

"A fool an' his money are easy parted," Johnny grinned. "He's been belly achin' around that he was gypped outa the prize. He's rarin' to show us he can ride. Wants to bet the works. Why shouldn't we accommodate him? He'll never learn younger. An' he picked Nigger White 'cause he said the reason they didn't use Nigger in the contest was nobody could ride him straight up—an' he *can!*"

Mike laughed.

"Go to it," said he. "Nigger won't hurt him, that's one thing. But he'll throw him so high the eagles 'll build nests in his hair. Do the damn' fool good."

Johnny vanished. Twenty minutes later Mike saw him come leading Nigger White from the Half Moon remuda. As Mike watched the pilgrim drag his heavy double rig out into the dusty street his conscience smote him a little. But there was no stopping it now. The sidewalk was lined with expectant faces. Among them Mike heard murmurs, snatches of conversation. He hunted around until he got hold of one of his own men. The whispers were correct. The pilgrim was backing his horsemanship with money. Frank Dodd, reeling drunk, was still offering to take bets that the pilgrim would "ride 'im an' whip 'im."

A bartender sidled up to Mike.

"Kin this feller sure ride?" he asked in an undertone.

Mike shook his head.

"They're bettin' a heap of money he can," the bartender murmured. "My boss is holdin' the stakes behind the bar."

"Who's bettin' he can?" Mike asked.

"Well, mostly this Dodd party," the bartender admitted.

"He's loaded to the guards," Mike snorted. "An' the pilgrim's just plum crazy with the heat, I guess. It's a shame to take their money."

"Maybe," the bartender grinned, "but she's a good show for the boys, just the same."

The pilgrim got his cinches tight, shook the saddle gently. The big, deep chested bay turned a bright eye on the audience, pricked up his ears. He was gentle as a pet dog till a rider's leg crossed him.

JOHNNY ROBB eased his horse over to the sidewalk with a wide smile of anticipation. The pilgrim stood at his reins' end for a second or two. His floppy hat drooped. His chaps had rents in them. His cheap boots had run over at the heel. He looked frayed and cheap and ridiculous and Mike felt sorry for him. And the pilgrim was speaking to his waiting audience.

"You fellers think I can't ride. Well, I can. I've done told you I could. I should 'a' had that prize money. You've

done bet me I can't ride this crowbait. Well, you can kiss your money goodby. Don't say I didn't tell you. The money you've bet agin me is a gift."

Then he turned to Nigger White, gathered his reins tight, eased his foot into the stirrup, hooked the fingers of his right hand over the horn and went up.

So did Nigger White. His blazed face sunk between his knees, he rose in the air like a soaring bird and hit the ground stiff legged with a snort like a buck deer.

Mike held his breath for ten seconds. The pilgrim rocked and swayed. But he didn't leave the saddle. He didn't lose either stirrup. For ten swift arching buck jumps he jabbed his spurs home every time Nigger White plunged. Then he snatched the floppy hat off his head with one free hand and fanned the Half Moon's worst horse, meanwhile letting out an occasional shrill whoop to match the equally shrill whoops of Frank Dodd who capered in the dust, yelling:

"Ride 'm pilgrim! Ride 'm 'n' rake 'im. Whoop—ee—ee!"

And the pilgrim rode, whipping, spurring, yelling, through all the varied repertoire. Nigger White pitched straight ahead, swapped ends in the air, sunfished. His best effort couldn't dislodge his pack. Not once did the pilgrim pull leather. He kept his rein hand out in front. Not once did he cease to whip and spur and yell.

And since Nigger White nor any other horse could last long in that dizzy swirl of equine agitation the pilgrim presently sat triumphant in the middle of a panting, blown buck jumper entirely devoid of any further ambition to buck him off.

"Have I rode him?" the pilgrim croaked. His face was red from exertion.

"You sure have," they chorused. "You sure win."

"Can he ride?" Frank Dodd shouted. "I'll tell a man he can ride!"

No one disagreed with him. But most of the Half Moon cowpunchers, Mike noticed, were not particularly enthusiastic in the admission.

"All right."

The pilgrim stepped down and unsaddled. He faced the Half Moon group with a broad grin.

"The drinks are on you fellers. I told you I could ride."

"You go plumb to hell," Johnny Robb grunted sourly. "You're ridin' looks fishy to me. Go buy your own drinks."

"I will," the pilgrim said cheerfully, "but I'll buy 'em with your money, old-timer."

THE PILGRIM and Frank Dodd disappeared together into the saloon where the stakes were held. The Half Moon crowd stood in a knot on the sidewalk. They didn't look altogether happy.

"Well," Johnny Robb said, "it looks like them two made suckers of us."

"You've been havin' a heap of fun with the pilgrim the last two months," Mike pointed out. "You bet he couldn't ride an' he showed you he could. You got no license to roar. How much did you all lose?"

"Cleaned me," Johnny Robb grumbled, and stalked away.

Others named various amounts. Mike whistled, first in surprise, finally in sheer amusement. Between them the pilgrim and Frank Dodd had taken just about all the loose change in the Half Moon, with a few odd bets from outside stockhands. The pilgrim had put up only the original fifty with Johnny Robb, but Dodd apparently had taken every bet offered in his alcoholic enthusiasm for the pilgrim. The total ran to something over eight hundred dollars.

"Well, you fellers went lookin' for it, an' you found it," Mike said at last. "The pilgrim ain't a pretty rider, but he *is* a rider. He didn't tell no lie; we just didn't believe him, that's all."

Neither the pilgrim nor Frank Dodd were much in evidence the rest of that evening. Dodd became apparently helplessly drunk, and the pilgrim got him a room in the Harper House, and went early to bed himself. Nor was either man in the Half Moon camp when the riders

answered the cook's strident call to breakfast.

Mike Stratton, Johnny Robb and Red Burgess rode into Saco after breakfast. As they dismounted by a hitching rack the west bound passenger came drumming up the tracks.

Johnny and Red strolled across to the depot platform. Saco got only brief stops. When they stepped up on the planking the pilgrim and Frank Dodd were heaving sacked saddles into the baggage car. They turned to the steps of a coach.

The pilgrim had doffed his exaggerated cowboy gear. He had on new boots and a plain serge suit. He looked somehow rather more capable, rather more like a competent range rider than he had ever looked around the Half Moon camp.

The train barely halted. It gathered way again, slid along the platform.

"Hey, you leavin' us?" Johnny Robb called in surprise.

The pilgrim, a coach length away and gathering speed, cupped his hands over his mouth and called back—

"Just tell the boys you saw me but you didn't see me saw!"

Neither Johnny Robb nor Red Burgess understood this cryptic reference. But they did understand the insulting significance of the pilgrim's last visible gesture. He put his thumb to his nose and waggled the fingers of that hand derisively at them.

Johnny Robb flipped out his gun. Not to slay, only to waft a bullet breeze by the pilgrim's face to warn him he couldn't deride and insult his betters with impunity. But Johnny had a level head. He didn't shoot—since he reflected that a .45 slug would plow through the wood of that day coach and that innocent people sat unsuspectingly inside.

So the pilgrim passed, and the hope of great sport and a quick turnover in cash, which had warmed the Half Moon riders the day before, passed with him.

WHEN fall roundup began, a rep from the Judith Basin ambled with his string into the Half Moon camp. Somebody mentioned the pilgrim incident a day or so later. The rep exhibited curiosity, asked questions, snorted.

"Say," he inquired, "was this other feller, this Dodd, a lean lank party with a face like a hawk? A pretty good all round hand? Did this fool pilgrim ride a Gallup and Frazier double rig?"

"Yes," they chorussed.

"An' this pilgrim he was sure green an' awkward? He was not very tall, kinda thick shouldered, an' round faced?"

"That's him to a T," said they.

"Didja ever hear of Kid McIntyre, that won the world's championship at a Frontier Day celebration at Denver three years ago?" the rep asked with apparent irrelevance.

Everybody had heard of Kid McIntyre—a riding fool, who needed only a *haquima* and a pair of spurs to stay in the middle of any horse that ever snorted through a pair of nostrils.

"Well, your pilgrim was Kid McIntyre," the rep chuckled. "This Frank Dodd is his partner. Real name is Swift. They worked that same play on a horse outfit in the Judith early last fall. They pulled it over on the Yellowstone a while before that. They get a lot of fun out of it—an' they make it pay. How much did they touch you all for?"

"Speakin' for m'self," Johnny Robb answered sadly, "I'm still overdrawed two months' pay from the outfit. The sawed off, hammered down runt could sure ride. He fooled us plenty. I'd like to meet up with that there green, awkward pilgrim for just about a minute."

But neither Johnny nor any of the Half Moon ever did. The pilgrim was afar, seeking fresh fields in which to make his peculiar sense of humor produce liberal dividends.

Concluding

GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND'S

Novel of Perilous Seas

The ROARING HORN

JASON MELLISH, cadaverous old owner of the dingy and ill found windjammer *China Girl*, paid Captain Bohannon a cool twenty thousand dollars to take the hulk of a vessel, laden with railroad iron, to Cape Horn and sink her—for insurance. But Jason Mellish did not know, that morning when the *China Girl* left her Staten Island pier, that in the hold was Roderick Tyson, the very nephew for whose profit the murderous voyage was planned.

And as the ship plodded southward, none but Leadspitter, the brutal first mate, knew that Captain Bohannon had found a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars in the suitcase of dying old Mr. Raineaux, whom they had picked up from a burning yacht, and that Raineaux's daughter, Isora, knew more of navigation than himself. Leadspitter, knowing of this enormous fortune aboard ship, killed Captain Bohannon and attributed the death to accident—and with this disaster fell all chances of the ship's putting into port before attempting the Horn. For Captain Bohannon had intended to be set ashore at Bahia Blanca before sending his shanghaied crew to their doom on the world's worst corner.

Leadspitter drove the crew with fist and oath. He kept Tyson before the mast and made Isora his first mate. And a damaged and disheartened ship's company he had, if any ever toiled and cursed. Chilled, soaked and hungry, they mutinied.

After the mutiny Tyson found himself master of the foredoomed ship; and Leadspitter, with a broken leg, was left in his cabin to ponder upon his fate—death at the Horn, or charges of murder if ever he reached Valparaiso. Still some of the crew refused to work. But headed toward the world's most perilous seas, with Isora as his first mate, with half a crew, Tyson drove the ship ever nearer and nearer to the stormy Straits.

THE WIND, by some rare miracle for those latitudes, held steadily favorable. Even under shortened canvas, the *China Girl* drove at good speed southward through the Straits. Neither Tyson nor Isora went below. In those treacherous waters, vexed by sudden fogs and snow squalls, or by williwaws and savage gales leaping with demoniac malice from the ironbound heights, eternal vigilance is usually the price of life itself.

"This is a very rare wind we're having today," Tyson presently remarked. "We've got a clear run on a sou' sou'west course. If this only holds twenty-four hours more, by gad, we'll win through! There's plenty of good open water beyond the Straits. Coast draws away to westward sharply. By tomorrow noon we may be off the Horn with Diego Ramirez dead ahead, and perhaps the worst of our troubles will be over."

"Perhaps!" she returned.

Then both in silence continued their vigil. Tyson was thinking:

"We'll make it this time! Short handed, yes, but we've taken no serious damage."

True, he reflected, the leak had become more threatening. One hour's backbreaking toil at the pumps, in every watch, now hardly sufficed to hold the water in check. But even this was not presumptive evidence of disaster, did the ship take no further racking.

"We'll make it, right enough!"

Exultation filled him; the joy of a man who, having set his hand to a harsh and imperilled task, sees victory ahead.

At about four bells of the afternoon watch—the Tierra del Fuegan coast already beginning to retreat somewhat—Tyson swung inboard from the rail and went below. He sat awhile pondering over a bite and sup in the cabin; then with a purposeful air he went to Leadspitter's door, knuckled it and entered.

"Well, what the hell d' *you* want, you mutineer?" demanded Leadspitter from his bunk.

By the dull light seeping in from the port, he made an ugly red headed and sullen figure of defeat. Helpless he lay there, snarling with yellow teeth at Tyson. Tobacco juice stained his unshaven chin. His leg, splinted with small pieces of board that old Abey had cut from a box of canned goods, held him immobilized. The drawn together knife slash in his ribs made every breath a pain.

"If I wasn't fished up here an' out o' commission, I'd learn *you* to be comin' in my cabin, you scut!"

"Cut out the rough stuff, Leadspitter," Tyson retorted, closing the door. "I'm in command now, and I want a few words with you. Kind of a heart to heart, as you might say."

"Heave ahead an' be damned to you! I'm a hulk on a lee shore. Smashed up by the mutiny you bred! Mr. Mayes is in bunk with his shoulder all shot to pieces. You can talk an' I got to listen."

His jutty brows contracted with a passion of hate, with physical pain and the anguish of having lost not only all those thousands but also every hope of greater wealth.

"You an' that woman, you've grabbed authority. But it's rank mutiny. My reckonin' will come later, by the jumpin' Judas!"

"You're right for once. It will!" Tyson agreed with a sort of geniality more galling far than any blustering attack.

He lighted his pipe and, sitting down, made himself quite at ease. "There's a lot coming to you, old boy. You'll have to do some pretty tall explaining when we make Valparaiso."

"What d'you mean by that?" Leadspitter demanded, his voice patterned with an anxiety he could not quite dissemble.

"I mean," explained Tyson, between smoke arrows, "when a ship's captain is injured, but getting better, and then suddenly and mysteriously dies—when the mate is seen, *seen*, mind you, carrying his body to a cabin where the mate claims he died—"

"Here, what you drivin' at?"

"And when a good many thousand dollars of the captain's money are found in that mate's possession, it looks interesting for the mate; doesn't it, now? You'll have to do *some* explaining!"

"You—you—"

"Quite a bit of explaining, I'll say. Instead of preferring charges against me, you'll be answering 'em."

"Who seen me?"

"Never mind. Somebody."

"It's a frameup! A damn' lie. I never!"

"I'd hardly expect you to admit it. But I've got a first rate witness."

"What are you accusin' me of—murder?"

"Precisely. And grand larceny. No use standing off and on, Leadspitter. You're in the biggest jam of your life—and the last one. This is your royal finish."

"Lies, lies, rotten damnable lies!" bellowed Leadspitter. He tried to heave up on his elbow, but fell back groaning. "It's all part o' your hellish, mutinous plot! Burn me, but I—when we make port, I'll—"

"You'll get seven bells knocked out o' you, old boy, that's what," smiled Tyson, studying his pipe smoke. "And what's more, you know it."

"If I was on to my pins, by God, you wouldn't be handin' me the like o' this! I'd soon learn *you!*"

Tyson only laughed, drew from his pocket the torn and trampled manila envelope and held it up before Leadspitter's bloodshot eyes.

"This is going into court, too, along with my star witness," he remarked. "You're in for squalls—heavy ones."

Leadspitter tried to snatch the envelope, but only caused himself exquisite agony. Half fainting with that, with hate and terror, he writhed in his bunk, a hideous and envenomed creature.

"That's all I wanted to say, old boy," grimly remarked Tyson.

He got up and for a moment remained looking down at the doomed man.

Threats, obscene blasphemies, panting and wordless savagery burst from Leadspitter. His hairy fists, now impotent, shook at the calmly observant Tyson.

"That's all I wanted you to know," Tyson at last remarked.

Shoving the manila envelope back into his pocket, he turned and quitted the cabin, leaving Leadspitter to his superheated, private hell.

CHAPTER XIX

TEMPEST

IN SPITE of the disquieting leak that kept continually on the increase, next morning found the situation considerably improved. Under Tyson's command, discipline had again shaken down into some coherent form; the life of the ship, though weakened, was once more going on with reasonable efficiency as she drove ever into colder and more stormy seas.

Mutiny had crippled the *China Girl* to the extent of two men dead—the Cockney and the gangster—and four wounded. These were Leadspitter, Peter Mayes, Stackhouse and the negro.

"Leadspitter's out of it for good," Tyson remarked to the girl at breakfast. "From what I can judge of Mayes' wound, he'll hardly pull round in time to bear a hand before we make port. Stackhouse and Broadfoot can turn to for light duty

in a day or two. Alcaniz isn't hurt enough to notice it. We've got thirteen men before the mast, with cook and carpenter to help out in a pinch."

"Not too bad," Isora judged, looking at him with an appraisal that still bore just a trifle of surprise.

Tyson's appearance had already undergone notable changes. He had of course taken possession of Bohannon's cabin and outfit. Now decent clothes and a shave had brought him swiftly up from the seeming depths of proletarian impropriety; even though the razor had left his jaw oddly white by contrast with the dark tan of his upper face. Old Abey Buzzard, tremendously impressed by Tyson's metamorphosis, now waited on him with an obsequious attention he had never shown Bohannon.

"A rale, proper cap'n, this 'un is, now!" the steward analyzed him. "An' when it comes to sharin' up the money, he won't forget *me*. My glorianna, no!"

"Thirteen men," Tyson repeated, while the girl watched him with eyes that seemed dimly to divine how inextricably the bonds of fate were being woven round her life and his. "Enough, I guess, to stand watch and work ship. We're short handed, all right. Short, to a point where perhaps wiser heads than ours might put back. But, what do you say?"

"I say, go ahead, round the Horn!"

"Ah, now, that's the kind of answer I like, sir!" And he smiled light heartedly. "You're one woman in ten thousand!"

"No woman at all, sir," she corrected. "I'm just mate of the *China Girl*. Never forget that! How do they feel, forward? Any rebellion left in any of them?"

"Well, I reckon the Scorpion, the taxi driver and the Spaniard would still like to start something, but they're outclassed. Most of 'em are pleased as Punch, what with the improved rations and the chance of a whack up on the loose money that nobody seems to own. Besides, they've got no guns. And they realize—the bad actors do—that the after guard isn't afraid to shoot, and shoot to kill. There's still plenty of fear and superstition in the focsle," he added, "but it can't do any harm. Those fellows, even the worst of 'em, will have to go through. Two or three, of course, would like to knife me, but—"

"They look on you as a traitor?"

"Of course! But that's the least of my troubles. You and I are the *de facto* government now, and we're going to rule!"

"Or die!" she added. "It can't be much longer, now."

"Not a great while. What we've got to do now is get a good southing. I figure to run down a little below the latitude of Diego Ramirez. After that, we may get a shift of wind that will let us haul to west'ard. Once we make port there'll be time enough to unravel the rights and wrongs of things. Just now, our job is rounding the Horn!"

"That, and nothing else!" the girl agreed with a kind of debonair enthusiasm immensely pleasing to his mood.

"All right, sir," he laughed. "Round the Horn is where we're going, sink or swim!"

With which word he arose from the table. Donning Bohannon's heaviest pea jacket, he went up to see how the old *China Girl* was coming along.

AS HER course lay, she had already dropped the crags and peaks of Tierra del Fuego far down the horizon to northwest, and was standing only a point or so west of south. So stiff was the wind that she carried nothing above topsails and courses. Short handed as she was, the risk of spreading her handkerchiefs would have been too great.

"But we can work her, all right," Tyson thought. The feel of the gun in his pocket was comforting. "If it takes gunpowder to put her round, that's what she'll get, by gad!"

The ship was now running with what are called "kalashie" watches—all available hands standing by for call in case of need to trim sail. Save for this and the almost continuous pumping, other work had been abandoned. Whatever else might need doing, Tyson reckoned, could

wait until Cape Stiff lay well astern.

Now that they were through the Straits and stretching down toward the Horn itself, the character of the seas had already begun to change. Precursors of the famous Cape Horn rollers had begun to make themselves felt—those immense, trundling mountains of brine so justly feared by every mariner; huge cold devils rolling unimpeded round the world, through the easting.

Gray as the premonitory outscouts of them were, the sky loomed grayer still, and colder. Save for an ugly and sullen smudge of pale lemon yellow along the west, no hint of sun was visible in all that sterile immensity of sea and sky; no sign of life appeared, except a far wheeling speck that marked the flight of a lone albatross. A new and more penetrant chill, fingering at Tyson's throat, made him button up the pea jacket tightly. Mr. Saltash, for all *his* buttoning-up, was a-shiver and blue. Down in the waist, the men were chafing numb hands, kicking feet that tingled. Though the calendar marked April twentieth, keen air and menace of snow felt more like northern January.

"Mr. Saltash?" Tyson addressed the ex-boatswain.

"Yes, sir?"

"Pass the word to all hands forward I'll outfit them with warmer things, so far as the slopchest holds out."

"Good, sir. Dey'll be needin' 'em soon enough, by de look o' de sky."

"And, Mr. Saltash, if any of 'em say they don't feel like affording it, you might just give 'em a hint there'll be nothing said about it when we make port."

Old Saltash opened eyes of astonishment, blue in his mahogany face. This, now, was something new at sea!

"You mean, sir—?"

"You understand me! That's all!"

And Tyson swung on his heel, thinking: "After what Uncle Jason's been up to, damn' queer if I can't take it on myself to give away a few cheap slops!"

Then he fell a-pondering the ship's chances and the evil fate which had so far pursued her. Death had surely stalked this lonely ship through the far seas where weeks on end no other sail had vexed the immeasurable solitudes. One by one Tyson counted the dead—Isora's father, Captain Bohannon, the Cockney, the gunman. Four, so far. Enough!

"Lucky if there's no more," thought he, "before we drop our hook at Valparaiso!"

ONE MORE day of reasonably decent weather would have seen the *China Girl* well on her way between the rugged bleakness of Diego Ramirez and the grimly naked spur of old Cape Horn itself. That one day's respite, however, was not written in the Book of Fate. More capriciously temperamental than a neurotic woman, Cape weather can never be counted on for anything but sudden and furious spells of savagery.

Until well on to midnight, wind and sea served passably. Then however it chopped about, backing round to west northwest, and set in to blow with ever increasing violence. Tyson came on deck, looked, appraised, gripped the shank of his pipe more tightly than ever in his hard teeth. Untoward though all this was, he recked little of changing his course, but with firm set pertinacity kept the ship bowling away almost due south. He shortened down, though, taking off mainsail, reefing topsails and foresails, and furling the upper mizzen topsail. This for the present, he felt, would be enough.

As ugly a morning sullenly dawned as one could well imagine. Dirty and gray and ocherous it glimmered up from the coal black pit of night, slashed with an ominous wound of cinnabar red, as the veiled sun rose, off to east by north. With high and increasing violence the gale began to build a dangerous Cape Horn sea, in which the strained old vessel heavily labored.

Tyson shortened still more, taking in the reefed upper topsails. With the wind abeam, he figured he might risk carrying on for awhile yet. Even though he were driven south of Diego Ramirez, that route might prove as desirable as the one

between Diego and the Horn itself. Sea room, at all events, there was enough and to spare. To the south now lay no obstruction nearer than the great ice barrier and the South Shetlands, still five or six hundred miles away. And perhaps some other shift of wind might presently make it possible to stand again to westward, through the most redoubtable liquid hell in all the seven seas.

At about eight bells of the morning watch Isora came up, but Tyson did not relinquish the quarter deck. Few words passed between them. Supple and strong in her oilskins, she stood and watched the raging, slate gray mountains of ocean that hove up their crests, towering and capped with shocks of foam ragged as torn lace. Under the woolly light that an angry blur of sun opened in vague alleys through drab cloud masses flung downwind in broken and defeated armies, Tyson saw her usually serene insouciance was troubled by just a shade of anxiety.

"What do you think, sir?" She ventured a question, half heard through the thung and thud of towering rollers plunging gray over the weather rail. "Looks as if we might have to square the yards and run for it?"

"Not yet!" The bronzed tan of his face glistened with hurled spray. "I'd be wronging the truth if I said I liked this, but we'll let well alone. We'll keep her on to the s'uthard, for the present."

"I know I've got no right to say it, sir, but you're maybe making a mistake."

"Men that never make mistakes, never make anything. I'm going to keep our best foot forward—keep going, south!"

As the day wore on, Old Ocean shook herself and began to growl in terrible earnest. A gale of fearful and blind voracity commenced wakening reckless uproars under an ever increasing murk. Fury and clamor ever more black, more ominous, piled the seas aboard. They crashed over the bulwarks, shattered, catapulted with a roaring hiss along the decks. Others, as though foiled of their prey, bellowed off in bull mouthed fury ot leeward.

Rain like molten lead pattered and stung, glistened on oilskins; went spinning off in tormented streamers. Snow began to spit and scud. The old *China Girl*, groaning as if her final hour were at hand, swayed up her spouting bows, then with swift and sickening lurches dived for the bottom, only to be battered up once more, a-quiver. Blowsy and drenched, blue with cold and pierced by the icy lances of the gale, the men sheltered themselves as best they might, cursed by all their gods and devils, and wished the ship in port or hell—small matter, which.

Toward noon the foresail carried away. Even though reefed, it tore to rags and blew clean out of the bolt ropes; flailed off with grotesque flappings like those of some preposterous bird, on gusts of roaring frenzy.

TYSON yielded then. He squared his yards and ran before it under only lower topsails. The ship now no longer labored so heavily, but seas still continued to board her.

Even with lifelines rigged it became difficult to get about the deck. Yet for all this, men had to keep pumping, when and how they could. Worse than ever now, the leak imperatively demanded it. Sometimes the gang at the pumps would be knee deep, waist deep in sluicing cold water; once in a way, up to their necks. They clung and cramped their parboiled, blistered hands to the wheels—and when they could, pumped on.

The galley fire was presently drowned out. No more hot food was to be had. Even had old Chubbock been able to prepare it, little could have been served. The screaming gale blew coffee out of the very pannikins. Eating, drinking had to be forgotten, save for a snatched bite of hard tack and salt junk. Chubbock himself had to flee from his gutted galley, like a drenched rat, and take refuge in the hardly less drowned forecastle.

Through everything Isora refused to stay below. In her tight lashed oilskins and sou'wester she bode there on the quarter deck, not at all out of counte-

nance at sight of the shattering seas, the shearing broils of white-water sucked down and hurled aloft in bursting sheets of foam, the ferocious boilings up of a watery world gone mad. Sheerly courageous, with a calm and simple breadth of indifference that death itself might now be near to tricking them, she stood and watched with Tyson. A sailor's daughter, she knew the ocean, loved it, refused it any homage of terror. What better place to die—if die one must—what safer place to sleep, than there?

So, maybe, Isora was thinking in the midst of all that turmoil, uproar, whirling spume, that shouting of mighty winds, those terrible and fierce bursts of charging seas. But—

"Not so good!" Tyson called at her. "These Cape Horn combers!"

The words were snatched spinning from his lips.

"I've seen it almost—as bad!" she made him hear. "We'll weather it!"

"Yes, yes!" Then, "Hold fast! She's going high!"

Racing from far astern, a giant of all giant waves was riding the ship down. At express train speed it surged behind her, its running height snow ridged with seething milk of foam.

A second that seemed eternity it appeared to hang suspended over them; then, as Tyson seized the girl and hauled her partly under the lee of the wheelhouse, it crashed upon the quarter deck, swept it from end to end.

Waist deep in dragging maelstroms they were spun along. Tyson held her fast, grappled the pinrail. Cascades, waterspouts belched overside and drained Niagara-like from the break of the deck, in shot geysers. Glass crashed. A ton or so of water deluged through the shattered skylight, made a swift whirling lake of the cabin.

From below echoed a howl. As the giant sea spouted off, old Saltash popped up. Dripping like a drowned rat, he held a crimsoned hand to his face. Brine and blood dribbled.

"Broken glass!" he shouted above the thunder of pounding sea and gale. "Me ear—nigh cut off! Ain't dis hell?"

"Get below!" Tyson roared against the hurricane. "Cabin—it'll drain—forrard doors!" Then to the girl, "Patch him up!"

A moment she hesitated. But old Saltash was bleeding like a stuck pig. So Isora handed herself along to the companionway and went down, followed by the old P. I., alternately cursing and imploring.

Tyson clawed his way forward to the break of the poop.

"Solomon Moon, aft!" he roared at the full bellows of his lung. "Planks and canvas! Skylight's stove in!"

The gale fair flattened him against the rail, wildly tossing, as the *China Girl* was harried along like a mad horse pursued by wolves. A question rose to Tyson, from her tormented fabric wallowing and drowned and racked, a-leak and seeming ready to give up the battle and plunge under. A question, vitally needful of strong and quick decision—

"Shall I try to heave her to and ride it out?"

He knew only too well the peril from a following sea, such as they had just then experienced. But the other alternative—was that not even more desperate?

As Chips Moon, watching chances, fought his way aft with repair materials, Tyson was weighing chances, too.

The danger of a ship running under scant canvas and trying to come up to the wind, lies in just this—that she does not carry way enough to bring her up speedily. Thus she may very easily find herself caught in the trough of the sea; and after that, all's likely to be over but the praying.

"I don't dare try it," Tyson realized. "She might founder in five minutes or less. That railroad iron, the leak and all! Her masts might go by the board, all the spars get whipped clean out of her. Might smash all to pieces!"

Well he knew that if the old Cape Horn graybacks took her abeam, they might swarm right over and bury her forever. That would be the end.

"Nothing for it but to run!" decided Tyson. "Run like hell—try to keep ahead of the seas—trust the storm'll finish before *we* do!"

THUS on what bade fair to be the *China Girl's* last voyage, the old ship fled to the southward and eastward.

Before that roaring hurricane from dark antarctic wildernesses of sea, unappeasable in fury that raged out of a blind and howling blackness, she scudded, a puppet and a jest of fate. And the mighty waters, regardless of man and all his trivial works, made merry sport of her.

The course the *China Girl* held, the only one now possible for her, was indeed driving her almost directly away from Cape Horn. Life, though, hung in the balances. Nothing now mattered but that one prime essential of all things—survival.

Far from abating as afternoon deepened toward night, the hurricane rose to a gaunt and high key of stark frenzy. All the drummers of the storm armies set more and ever more to the pulsing roar of their work, summoning every sinister power of sky and sea to smash the ship and have the struggle over swiftly, once for all.

Even under her scant canvas, the old square rigger foamed twelve, thirteen, then fourteen knots, hurled literally along before the frozen breath of that portentous hurricane.

Southeast she drove, beyond all power of being checked and still surviving; on, ever on toward the foam collared black and grim crags of the South Orkneys. A harried thing, she ran.

Over her constantly burst, exploding to gale shredded spindrift, the mammoth South Atlantic seas, by far the mightiest in the world. Mountains of rushing death, a universe of raging desolation thundered at her heels, ravening to destroy her utterly.

Onward she wearily tossed and staggered, crippled, helpless, lost. On, ever on—toward what?

CHAPTER XX

COLD HELL

FOR NEARLY a week the *China Girl* drove southward into an Antartic hell such as few men and fewer ships have ever known. The story of that agony is hard to write down soberly in words.

Wind and sea never abated, but on the contrary—were that possible—assailed the ship with ever increasing madness. Betimes the hurricane tore the very crests from the furious seas, sliced them off into vast floors covered with rushing seethes of white.

Darkness for the most part strode apace with that infuriate terror. Under a dome of black scudding cloud, the reaches of those bitter days fagged on in an obscurity that numbed mind and soul. Only twice or thrice a faintly lurid shield of sun half penetrated the rushing cloud blanket, brought a few pallid hours when the light itself, aflicker on those flung crests, gleamed mockingly, mercilessly cold. Now and again snow squalls raged in pursuit, blinding the men, scratching at their rheumy and salt reddened eyes, but constantly washed off by spray and bursting wave. Hail storms streamed and rattled, leaped from masts and yards astrain until they almost cracked, spun from deckhouses, and in windrows of ice piled their ammunition until again the combers swept them away.

A world of pain that had become for all hands a torment past describing, ringed in and bound by limitless expanses of fury. Aft as well as forward, the misery of the *China Girl's* wretched company grew so bitter that death itself looked sweet. Coherence of procedure was shattered. Men did only what they must, in broken and imperfect snatches of failing energy. All could feel, as old Chubbock put it, "de geel o' wind fair blowin' de breath out o' we—de life fair goin' out of our toes wid starvation an' perishin' grief. Wet as herrin' net ahl de time, an' narr bite ner pick o' proper grub to put on de inside o' we!"

No one now was ever dry. Being drenched to the skin with icy brine had become the normal condition. "Waterwelps" or saltwater sores had begun to form, particularly on wrists and forearms; raw abrasions of the skin, agonizing of smart and unable even to begin healing. The men at the wheel—for now two men were constantly required to hold the helm—had to be lashed there, even in the shelter of the wheelhouse. No one could get fore or aft at all, save by watching chances and making a run for it, jumping into the rigging, for very life, when a more savage comber than usual burst over, or flinging down upon the deck and gripping a ring bolt or any hand hold that offered.

Such pumping as could be done had to be snatched at, in rare lulls; nor could it ever effectually clear the bilges. Continually the sounding rod showed increasing water.

"Dis ship's weepin' worse an' worse all de time, sir," the wounded Saltash told Tyson. "Be a bloody miracle if she don't founder right away from under our feet. It will, so!"

Saltash, by the way, was threatened with blood poisoning. His ear, sliced nearly off by the flying glass, had refused to mend. Its being kept soaked in brine with never a chance to dry had conspired with his advanced years and undernourished habit of body to make the injury serious. Though he could still keep his watch, the hour might perhaps be soon at hand when he too—like Leadspitter and Mayes—would go "in bunk". That is, did the whole ship herself not break up and plunge to death in those wild shouting abysses of the Antarctic.

ON THE third afternoon of the hurricane the galley was completely stove in and dismantled. From then on the men forward had no cooked food at all, but had to snatch a bite of "biscuit and bully" when or how they could. The aft gang fared a little better in the cabin now darkened by Solomon Moon's rough patching on the skylight, patching that betimes let drizzles of cold brine come trickling down. For the cabin "bogey" or stove still remained in commission, and on it some rough makeshift at cookery could be done by old Abey Buzzard; though now and then wild lurches of the ship sent pots and kettles and scalding coffee "all goin' a-lee" across the drenched floor.

Through all adversity, though, Isora made no plaint. She only grew more silent, stood her watches day or night with few words and brief. But the color began to drain from her cheeks. Under her dark eyes, marks like faint bruises came to be shadowed. She smiled no more, and sometimes lost herself in long and profound abstraction that was more than pondering and less than fear.

A WATER famine presently became worse torture than the lack of proper food. By the fourth day all hands were hard set with bitter pangs of thirst. The ship's only present supply lay in her eight thousand gallon iron tank below decks, just abaft the mainmast, as her deck tank had for some time been exhausted. The below decks tank could be reached only through a plug in the deck, to which under normal circumstances a pump could be fitted.

With a world of brine constantly drowning the waist, it would have been suicide for any man to try removing the plug. He might instantly have been swept away. The fresh water in the tank, moreover, would all have been ruined. Only on rare occasions could a little water be got up, never enough to satisfy all hands; and sometimes even such as was obtained was spilled or salted before any one could drink it. For days on end the plug could not be opened at all. Another mockery of fate—agonizing thirst there in the very vortex of a universe of water!

On the fifth day of this unutterable torment, a storm shutter carried away on one of the cabin ports and the cabin itself was devastatingly washed out, so that as Saltash said—

"It's high-water in our bunks, now, same as forrard!"

Even after this damage was sketchily repaired, more than one huge sea backed up in the waist, ran over the sills of the cabin doors, and kept the place drenched.

"Now everythin' afloat, fore an' aft," said Saltash. "If we got to go to hell, we'll all hands go wet enough so we won't burn free. My glorianna, yes!"

And he blew into his hands to warm them; red, swollen hands, the palms bleeding raw from having fought with the spokes of the kicking wheel more than one watch when no one had been able to get aft to help the steersman. Saltash had taken hold, with him, and Tyson or the girl had stood the long black watches in that raving welter of madness.

The men became earthen faced, livid, gaunt and shaking with famine, continual freezing chill, never ending wetness that soaked to the very marrows. Many showed cuts and bruises; two or three had suffered dislocations from having been catapulted against pinrails or stanchions. Tyson battled his way forward and gave them what attention he could, which was precious little. Not now, even though men died, could injuries be thought of. Soaked, dripping like seaweed, a-shiver and for the most part terrified, they awaited what to them seemed the inevitable end.

For one thing, in this disaster that had befallen and that now was plunging them all through the dregs of punishment, any spirit of mutiny had been wholly crushed. Life itself hung on instant and unquestioning obedience to authority, whatever that authority might be—and it was given thus, and so the ship still lived. And while all this tough work was going forward, the former officers of the old square rigger—the knife slashed, broken legged Leadspitter, and Peter Mayes with the smashed up shoulder—dimmed out of the picture, leaving all power in the hands of Tyson, Isora and the injured but still able Saltash.

Yet what a sorry command was theirs! Only a racked, a leaking and half dead old ship under the scantest canvas, harried along through endless dark abysses of cold and tumult and infernal, raging desolation!

IT WAS on the sixth morning of the hurricane, with the *China Girl* against all expectation still alive, though floundering ever deeper, that terror found fresh oil to feed its flames. For hardly had some mockery of pale and livid dawn loomed over the immense, furiously piled seas, when from Bielefeld rang a hoarse and startled cry—

"*Land ho!*"

"Where away?" shouted old Saltash from the quarter deck, he being then on watch, while Tyson slept the sleep of utter exhaustion and Isora made some poor shift at a bite of breakfast.

"Where away?"

"Broad off de port bow, sir!"

Little enough this meant to Saltash. Little enough the ex-boatswain knew of the ship's position or what, exactly, might now be heaving in sight. Navigation, charts and all were largely mysteries to him. Here now was a situation that demanded better brains than his. He struggled to the wheelhouse and clattered loudly on the bell for reinforcements from below.

Isora presently came up, in flapping oilskins and with hair a-flying.

"What's wanted, Mr. Saltash?"

"Land reported, miss—sir, I mean! Lookout—just sighted it, t'ree p'ints on de port bow! Ye couldn't be tellin' me, now, what dat's like to be?"

She worked to the rail, clung and peered; and with her there, old Saltash. At first neither saw anything but tortured miles of the most desperate and raging ocean, gale infuriated, they had ever yet beheld. Old Saltash had less than no ideas at all; but she was speculating.

The guess "South Orkneys!" vanished from her mind with realization that, on the course the ship had driven, those perilous and naked islands of desolation could not possibly be menacing. Holding fast, she watched. As the ship careened into immense sea valleys of that marching

madness, all sight but frothing, fleeing water was blotted out. Then with a leap aloft of the *China Girl*, wide and jagged horizons swiftly opened.

Far to southward, the girl looked at these, over miles of tumbling, white reared combers. Gripped to the rail, she stood, a strange figure to be found on such a tortured ship in those distant wastes of ocean. Her darkly still and wide eyes searched out the distance from under the glistening rim of her sou'wester. A sailor's daughter, if any ever conned a ship!

Very far through auras of vagueness now she saw something, a something that might easily enough have been mistaken for land. But Isora knew it was not land, could not possibly be. That white shimmer, above which wraiths of eerie pinnacles floated upward to ghost mountains, gave her another story.

Those tall palisades of glimmering and spectral light, and now a more keen piercing chill that made her breath a flying vapor, told her the truth.

"*Ice!*" she realized.

CHAPTER XXI

ISORA, MASTER SEAMAN

ISORA'S mouth grew tight compressed. That frozen apparition of the towering ice—already she had seen such off the Greenland coast and knew it well—told her of irremediable disaster close at hand, unless in some way they could heave the ship to. The dark truth enveloped her that in only a few hours more the *China Girl*, gale driven, might be locked in a death grapple with the Antarctic ice.

Only one end could come of being bottled in the ice. With the year in this southern hemisphere now sunk deep toward winter, no possibility of escape for any of them could exist, once the now almost disabled ship, with her weakened and famished crew, were swept toward the ice barrier. Death lay in the ice, lurking, waiting; death without reprieve for all hands; death triumphant and inexorable.

With a heaviness of something very like despair she faced about to Saltash. Her voice was charged with portents of evil as she ordered—

"Call Captain Tyson—at once!"

"Somethin' bad is it, sir?" Saltash queried, his breath a mist of white vapor. "Dat wouldn't be de ice, eh?"

"Yes, it's the ice. Call the captain!"

Chilled with a terror colder even than that freezing hurricane, Saltash struggled his way below. As the vessel heaved at intervals aloft, Isora resumed her study of the shimmering and immense pallor that swept a menacing arc to southward in signal that the Ice King's palace, whereof the hospitality is death, lay awaiting them far to southward.

Tyson presently came on deck, clearing mists of blank, exhausted sleep from his eyes. These were far sunken in his head. His cheekbones stood high; and though no pipe could smoke in such a drenched gale, he clamped it in his teeth and held it there, iron strong. Jaded he looked, worn and ugly, with a stubble of untended beard. His hair was salt loaded and unkempt. Yet, tightly buttoned up in Bohannon's heaviest pea jacket, against the slicing cold, he made a stocky, muscular figure. In his hand he carried binoculars.

"What have we now?" he demanded, catching the rail beside Isora, while freezing spray whistled over. "Ice in sight?"

"Yes, sir," she replied. "Ice on the port bow."

He tried to focus his binoculars in the direction Isora had pointed out, but they revealed little more than the naked eye could see—just a pale, upward stretching gleam as from ghost fires of demon cold that burned on vague horizons.

"That's it, right enough," he acknowledged. "That's the ice blink, by gad!" He braced himself against the port rail, clung and watched. "There's ice ahead. That isn't the great ice barrier, yet, but we're getting close to its outposts. We're driving down askew on it, no question about *that!*"

"I didn't expect to see it so far north as this," she made him hear, though the gale whipped her voice away.

"We're aren't what you'd call very far north, now! We're well down below sixty. Maybe sixty-two, three—even four, for all we know. We haven't been able to get a sight in six days, now, and our dead reckoning is utterly unreliable when running before it, such weather as this. Another thing, this Antarctic ice has a devilish quéer habit of drifting farther north than you'd reasonably expect it."

"Sixty-t'ree or four, did you say, sir?" put in old Saltash, frowsy and woefully lantern jawed.

Tyson thought he detected a gleam of terror in Saltash's sunken eye. Sharply he made answer:

"That's what I said! You're not losing your nerve, eh?"

"No, sir!" cried the stout hearted old chap. "No, no, I'll stick by de ship, even if she get chock to de ice, an' fight it out! But how far ye reckon de ice lays now, sir?"

"Fifty miles. Hundred, maybe. Mirage in these latitudes—no telling!" Under the tan of his hard skin, Tyson's own color had faded a trifle. He rallied, though, adding, "We've still got sea room enough for awhile. Ship's not running so fast, perhaps, as she seems to, under a single maintops'l."

"We're in higher latitudes, though, than I like!" the girl exclaimed. "If we once get into that ice . . . "

"We're not going to get into it!" Tyson affirmed. "We'll take no finish either on icebergs or glaciers. If it's Davy Jones for ours, it'll be in clear open water, you can lay to that!"

"Going to bring her round to it?" she asked. "Port or starboard tack, sir?"

"We'll lay her on the starboard tack, when we bring to. But we can't bring her to under this canvas. We'll have to bend the spare foretops'l!" He fairly had to shout, to make Isora and old Saltash hear above the seething turmoil. "And we'll most likely need the fores'l, too—reefed, of course, as it is now!"

"And when—"

"Not just yet! We can wait a little longer. The gale may take off some. Can't last forever. Hold on maybe another fifty miles, if we have to. But the first sign of lull, round she comes! Matter of life or death then!"

TYSON lost no time in preparing for this forlorn hope.

The spare foretopsail was bent. It being sent up in the stops, this task was less desperate than reefing or furling. The spanker was reefed and held in readiness. And with this canvas, Tyson felt reasonably safe in laying the ship to, when last necessity should compel.

"We'll make it!" he confidently assured his officers. "Got to watch our chance. There's life in the old *Girl* yet—and that means hope!" His fist tightened like steel, to suit his mood. "Roar, you Cape Horn devils!" he growled under his breath. "Roar and be damned to you!"

Still for a little time deferring the last harsh chance that might end only in swamping the ship and finishing the whole gamut of agonies, they let her drive. What else lay in their range of possibilities? Tyson considered the old sea trick of paying out a cable from one quarter and taking it in at the other. Sometimes such a cable might break the chasing graybeard seas; but now he decided this maneuver would retard the *China Girl's* speed and might work damage when he should try to bring her round. For this, he waited only some chance break or lull in the tempest. Then all hands up, boys, and round with her!

The gale, however, refused to break. By noon it was surpassing itself in fury; howling and stamping on the ship with exultant frenzy as if by the very power of its turmoil and its terror to drive her under.

Two of the best men at the wheel—Tondern and Karlstad—could hardly keep her from broaching to. Now was

seen the wisdom of having a wheelhouse. It prevented any view of the terror that stalked behind them on those vast sea mountains—the ninth or tidal wave commonly reputed to be the worst of any. How often such monsters have broken over ships' sterns, killed exposed steersmen, smashed wheels, caused a broach to! Without the shelter of a house, even the stoutest hearted sailor in the world, looking back at the mile long mountains of gray glass peaked with snow, roaring, towering down, might feel the soul of courage dry away within him; might lose all nerve and heart—and with them lose the ship!

Squalls of sleet, boiling scudges of snow, snow powdery-fine like flour, raged over the liquid abyss, blinding the men, darkening the iron dome of heaven. Snow cowled all places unexposed to waves and spindrift, its swirls of hard flakes freezing to solid masses where they caught. And ever tons of ocean spat toppling aboard, taking deadly toll of the ship's racked timbers, so that the leak gained, ever gained; nor now could any men stand to the pumps and try to clear it.

That the *China Girl*, stiff with her cargo, did not incontinently founder—for this, thank the old ship builders of the honor days at Bath, when oak was oak, and ships were framed to stand all that sea devils had to give.

Yet for all her sturdiness, the ancient square rigger wallowed ever more heavily, logy and spent and tired, groaning, yielding, cracking. Rest, only "to shake hands with Davy Jones" and then have rest, peace for eternity; she seemed to beg no more!

The minutes and the hours grew to be a thunderous, unreal and dazing hell of agony and terror. As the ice barrier drew nearer, outposts of it grew visible in the form of bergs and growlers broken from its face and carried northward by strong setting currents that recked nothing of wind direction.

Now menaced a new peril, that of possibly being driven a-smash on one of these ghostly sea prowlers. As in an evil dream the wretches on the harried ship saw at mid-morning, not a quarter mile to port, a tremendous blue growler with a sphynx-like head. It plunged, rose dripping and sluicing. Immense, slow surfs leaping, dashing over it, frothed up, rushed down along its streaming, fretted flanks.

An hour from then the *China Girl* drove past a berg. When first sighted in far distances, it looked like a ragged hole torn in the black horizon. It seemed a flat thing, all in two dimensions. But presently it assumed mass and volume. Then swiftly it began to loom gigantic, almost across their tempest tortured way.

ISORA and Tyson, with smoking frosty breath, watched the berg together from the port side, as the ship sheered down close along its stupendous length.

"If that was our finish," Tyson smiled grimly, "it'd be a spectacular one, at all events!"

"It won't be our finish," she returned. "We'll clear it by—enough!"

"Yes, if it hasn't got any spurs under water, you know. If it has, we feverish, selfish little clods of ailments and grievances, as some writer or other calls people, we'll soon be past worrying!"

Then they fell silent, watching; and all hands, sheltering themselves as best they might, stared at this giant of the Antarctic seas.

An awesome spectacle, a sight of solemn and majestic beauty such as no other thing on earth possesses! Fear grew lost in wonder. As the ship weltered past, the chromatic thunder of breakers on the berg's towering sides roared louder even than the storm.

Majestically unmoved by the most devilish frenzy of the hurricane, paying no heed to gale or ravening combers, this giant of the sea fronted all furies with the calm of its immutable passivity. Implacably it went its way predestinate.

Overtopping the ship as a mountain tops a hillock, its vast pinnacles, shrouded in driven snow, disdained the tortured,

hunted handiwork of man. With an appalling and implacable power, moved in the grip of cosmic currents, the berg marched on, sublimely indifferent to the midgelike fretting of the tempest that swirled sleet and hail in long spun streamers from its lofty, half veiled shoulders and stupendous ivory battlements.

The *China Girl* drove skirling onward past that giant of the Antarctic seas—frost giant wandering from frozen, mystic places where man may never live—and so she reached the snow veiled end of it. That end was followed by a long "slick" of seas that only rolled enormously but, in the lee of the ice island, could not break. Here the ocean was thick strewn with loose ice fragments that heaved upon the oily and tremendous swell; weird shapes, gray-dripping, arched, eroded, gnawed into dream extravaganzas. As these gradually thinned out and vanished, the boiling combers once more began to break; and with the fading away of the stupendous berg—now far astern seeming the ruins of some fabled Atlantis—the screaming violence of gale and sea once more assailed the stricken ship.

More lonely now than ever she drove onward, away from the berg. That apparition of incalculable majesty, of thunder and of luminous glory, seemed abandoning the *China Girl* to death. Indifferent to all, the iceberg went its own immutable and appointed ways.

All at once the cloud wrack to northward of the dying ship was torn as by an angry hand. The sun's lurid disk gleamed through. Far, sullen, it spilled blood across the dark splendors of sky and racing sea; lighted a belt of sooty vapors shrouding the west; glinted from crests of waves in swift running flashes; lanced long beams of chilly splendor through the shouting gale. From mast and yard and rigging glittered ten thousand diamond lights. Under the glare of that weird sun, the *China Girl* became a crystal ship of jewels on a sea of running flame.

A moment Tyson hesitated at the brink of supreme decision. That sungleam, even though remote and menacing, kindled a glow in him, as in his numbed and wretched ship's company. The minute, he felt, was come at last, the minute when risking all, they might lose all. But too, the minute when delay might end in ignominious death without a fight for life.

"It's now!" he cried to Isora, arousing from bemusement that the berg had wrought upon him. "If we're going to bring her to at all, we've got to do it *now!*"

She nodded, and he knew she understood. Like him she glanced aloft at the ice stiffened rigging, yards, canvas all aglitter. Like him she looked abroad at the fleeing cloud shadows afar; the dripping blood of light from the wounded sun; the rushing seas here dashed with swift ruby sheens, there tarnished into fleeing patinas of richest bronze, and in the offing flecked with sanguine gold that flared in liquid bars across the black sea circle. Down toward the pale ghost loom on the southern ice horizon a solitary albatross was skimming, glad in the tempest, its wild heart at peace in all that ravening tumult. And the girl, with a quick smile, assented.

"All right, sir!" she called to Tyson. "Now's our chance!"

Her eyes were shining like deep pools of darkness flecked with moongleams. Under their long lashes they smiled bright and unafraid.

"No use waiting any longer," he judged.

"Still blowing a whole live gale," she answered. "But we can make it! This can't keep up much longer, and any sort of change—"

"Any change 'll be to the good. It couldn't get worse! That's impossible!"

"Think she'll come up under the maintops'l alone, sir?" Isora made him hear, pointing to where that lone sail strained aloft, rigid as a board.

"Maybe not. But she may, with the help o' the spanker. I'm figuring now whether we should set the forestops'l to give her more way as the helm goes down.

It's a question if the canvas will stand. That foretops'l we bent has seen lots o' service!"

A moment longer he studied the problem. No sterner one was ever faced by any shipmaster. With a crew of such poor quality and partly disabled, an old and wracked ship, rigging and sails unreliable, the task lay heavy with extreme peril. But no alternative offered. The slim chance must be grappled with. Time was growing desperately short. And if worse came to worse—well then, better meet death in clear water, with a dismasted and foundering vessel, than wait for it helplessly drifting to inevitable destruction in the Antarctic ice! Never that! Let them go down to Davy Jones' locker, if they must, but keep fighting to the last, while two planks held together!

TYSON laughed a little wildly. A man who laughs like that refuses to palter with destiny; he makes it for himself. Red gleams like ice and fire lurked in his eyes.

"There's a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft to keep watch o'er the life of poor Jack!" he quoted the old sea lines to her. "Well now, with our gear frozen and our ship half foundering, here's a job for Mr. Cherub, by gad!"

He worked his way to the companion and sent a thundering call down for the second mate. When the worn and suffering Saltash appeared:

"We're going to bring her to on the starboard tack," Tyson informed him. "Get all hands that can move to stand by the braces. We'll try it first with the maintops'l and spanker. If she comes up under that, well and good. If not, we may have to set the foretops'l and fores'l to give her more way!"

"All right, sir," from Saltash. "It's gone a little bit over ornery sea work. It's a hard drudge, sir, but we'll try!"

"Nothing else for it now!"

"Worth tryin', sir. She might do it under what canvas she got." And Saltash squinted a wise eye aloft. "Dat is, if de spars'll stand when we gets in de trock o' de sea!" As former boatswain of the *China Girl* he knew better than any other the parlous condition of her spars and rigging. "Here goes, sir!"

In pain, and weakened as he was, his spirit still held strong. He fought his way along forward and mustered a group of the ablest, most expert men.

"Come on, me lucky b'ys! Goin' to bring her to—our only chanst now. It's dat, or hell, for all o' we, so remember ye're workin' for y'r own lives. Lay aft!"

None rebelled. None murmured. Even the most inexperienced understood the nearing ice, the growing menace of that ghostly glim to southward. The prospect of death, should they fail, gave them courage, the courage of men fighting in the last ditch of hope.

The task they now were undertaking verged on the impossible. Even for men well fed and hearty, in that blind gale, it would have been tremendous. Half starved, drenched, perishing with cold, they had to call up nearly their last reserves of strength and will, to carry on. But carry on they did; for when "must" summons, men obey.

While the forlorn hope worked their way aft Tyson turned to the girl.

"Go below!" he ordered. "You're all in. I don't want to risk you against what may happen when we're broadside on to the sea. You may be needed for navigation afterward!"

Blue with the deadly cold, hardly able to cling to the quarter deck rail, ice coated in her yellow oilskins and marrow pierced by that deadly, knifing chill, Isora none the less refused, point blank.

"No, sir! I'm going to see this through, just like you and all the rest. I'm mate of this ship, and my place in on deck when it's all hands!"

"By God!" was all Tyson could find to say.

He forebore to argue, entreat or use authority to force her below. Giving her no further heed, he turned to the desperate work now in hand, while the old square rigger drove ever onward toward the ice edge and grew ever more heavily

ice laden. He too moved in a carapace of frozen crystals, as did they all. Congealed drops clung in pearls to his eyebrows and his ragged beard.

What mattered this, or anything, now that the one great task lay close at hand?

TYSON swung toward the old second mate.

"Hands aft and haul out the spanker, Mr. Saltash!"

With strength nerved to the utmost by their peril, they grappled the spanker outhaul, stained on its icy length with gouts and smears of their blood from cracked, cut hands. Ice stiffened their sea gear, frost reddened their lean faces. Their breath, panting with toil, flew like white wraiths down wind. Freezing and all but dead, still no respite waited them.

Saltash attended the sheet under Tyson's supervision. Inch by inch they hauled the sail along to the boom end and finally set it, while the helm was starboarded to prevent the vessel's flying up into the wind before the port braces could be manned.

Tyson keenly noted the effect of the sail. His confidence strengthened that the ship would come up under the maintopsail. He conned her for a few minutes, then—

"Port main brace!" his voice gusted.

To the helmsman:

"Hard a-port! Let her come up easy. Watch the sea!"

The sweating pair hove the wheel hard down, and reported—

"Helm's hard a-lee, sir!"

Now the *China Girl*, as she came up to the snoring gale brought the gigantic seas abeam. They swept her from rail to rail. Under their terrific broadside attack she groaned in mortal agony, madly reared and plunged like Mazeppa's white stallion. The tempest, now that they were no longer driving before it, seemed to have leaped to more immeasurably savage malignancy.

All the smashing hitherto taken seemed trivial to this. Monstrous rollers boarded, battering her down as she lay helpless in the trough. On the drowned decks nothing was visible but cataracts of frenzied and cold gray water frothing from break of forecastle to poop, water in which numbed men fought for what poor life still lay in them, battled to hold from being swept outboard, away, like chips upon a millrace.

The dazed crew, deep in swirling brine, could hardly keep their feet at all in that sucking sluice. Their puny efforts seemed how futile, how hopeless to front that hurricane!

There the ship lay slugged by gale and sea like a pugilist tottering before the inevitable knockout. Loose gear streamed to leeward, flailing, snapping. On that moment hung destiny. Would she come up? She seemed in the very article of death. Now, they all thought, the *China Girl* was foundering.

In this pregnant moment, one old grandfather of all graybacks roared over the rail. It cleared the waist, whirling the house away in shattered fragments, under the impact of those bellowing tons of brine. That mighty and snarling comber thundered over the forecastle head. The vessel quivered under massed attack of sea and howling, sleet laden hurricane.

As she poised a moment on that mountain crest of wave, foam streaked as by some giant spider's web, the strained anchor lashings burst asunder. The anchors leaped from their chocks, smashed down, biting through the head. Deluges of that maniac sea drenched through the ragged holes.

Black, fierce boiling pandemonium assailed the ship. That monster wave swept away the poop ladders and hurled all the running rigging coiled on the pins into an utter, chaotic tangle. It burst in the cabin doors like matchwood, devastatingly gutting the cabin.

No man alive there but felt this icy nightmare of frothing annihilation spelled the end. Some were flung a-tumble on and under six feet of raging water, dashed against bulwarks and hatch coamings. Bruised, battered, stunned, they clung as best they might.

The ship hung between sky and sea, then plunged to abysses of that liquid inferno. But such of the men as could, stubbornly returning to their work, bowsed the lee and weather braces taut.

The ship, powdered with white from blind scats of snow, jerked fearfully in the trough. Her deadweight of railroad iron in the hold prevented an easy roll. The short, spasmodic strain on masts and yards became terrific. And all at once with a rending crash from aloft the main topgallant mast carried away in the doublings.

With it went the three yards it carried. The fore and mizzen royal masts accompanied it in the general ruin, their weather backstays parting.

In the deadly peril of the ship, however, the carrying away of this top hamper was of itself scarcely noted. The *China Girl* was leaping high, twisting, slewing, crashing down as she sounded the depths of those black sea valleys with wrenching groans and plaints like the growlings of a wounded beast.

She now lay in a position where a few minutes more inevitably meant foundering.

The wrecked top hamper, floating close under the lee quarter, kept hauling the ship away from the wind despite all the power of the helm and the reefed spanker. Tyson saw his maneuver doomed to failure. He ordered the helm up again and the main yards squared.

"Cut away all that wreckage!" he shouted.

Imminent peril existed that the mass of spars and canvas might hole the ship, crashing through her lee side.

"Look alive, there! Cut it away!"

Saltash, well knowing what must be done, was already providing such of the men as could still stand with axes and cutting tools from his locker and the carpenter shop.

"Aye, aye, sir!" he shouted back. "Cut away it is, sir!"

Tyson addressed himself to some of the less injured men—

"Pick up those damaged fellows and stow 'em in the cabin; look alive!"

Two or three, obeying, dragged the hurt ones aft—Tabry with a broken arm, the Rock Scorpion bleeding in rivulets from a gashed scalp, Antoon, the taxi driver, a mere unconscious lump.

ISORA, who had been anxiously watching all as she had clung on the heaving and spray swept poop, saw that the wreckage on the port quarter was mainly attached to the ship by the topgallant and royal backstays.

The *China Girl*, again running before the hurricane, was really towing all that mass of fractured spars on her port quarter. They checked her way considerably, but at the same time to some extent broke the smashing attacks of the following seas.

Inspiration flashed across the girl's brain. Might it not be possible to use this floating débris to accomplish the task that seemed so disastrously to have failed?

Were there any possibility of bringing that wreckage to windward—off the starboard bow—might it not only fetch the ship round to the wind, but also act as a sea anchor while the *China Girl* was forced to remain hove to?

The idea grew within her, forced itself to utterance. She worked her struggling way to Tyson.

"Captain!" she hailed him. "Why not break the ten inch hawser out of the forepeak, pass it along aft, outside, to starboard, round the stern and then—"

"Then what?" he demanded, not yet comprehending.

"Then make it fast to those togal'n' and royal backstays before you cut them away?"

"And then—"

"Don't you see?" Her dark eyes glowed with excitement. "The ship herself, running as she is, will bring all that raffle on the starboard bow. That, with the help of the spanker, will bring her to and serve as a sea anchor besides! Worth trying, eh?"

Tyson stared, as this ingenious seastratagem bit into his brain.

"By gad! Why didn't I think of that myself!"

No matter—she had given him the idea. On the instant he would follow it.

"Good idea, sir!" he ejaculated. "By God, a grand idea!"

On the second, turning, he once more called old Saltash.

"Hold hard, there, cutting away!" he shouted.

The old sea dog waited for orders. Tyson in a few words instructed him as the girl had suggested. The veteran grasped the plan and its purport almost as quickly as Tyson himself had.

"Damn *me*, but dat's a proper good 'un!" he vociferated. "Come on, me lucky b'ys—get forrard, now—look alive!"

With harsh, incredible labor they hauled up the hawser from the forepeak—fortunately a new one and almost the only piece of reliable gear aboard that parish rigged vessel. They passed its end out through the starboard mooring chock on the forecastle head, carried it aft outside the starboard side, and so around the stern to the port quarter, clear of everything.

Slogging through seas that smote them, floundering, gasping, they toiled. Tyson and two of his best seamen securely fastened the hawser with rolling hitch and stoppers to the two wire backstays, which now alone held the floating wreckage.

Thus done, they cut away the lanyards. The confused mass of raffle quickly drifted astern, then appeared on the starboard quarter and gradually worked wallowing toward the starboard bow.

Tyson meantime ordered the helm again put a-lee and the port braces checked in. Once more the *China Girl*, battered by that devastating beam sea, came up broadside on. But this time she inch by inch swung her bow to the gale, until finally she was brought to within six points of the wind.

The half submerged wreckage now lay several hundred yards to windward off the weather bow—a sea anchor that to no small extent diminished the ravenous hunger of the combers still threatening to engulf the ship.

Not yet entirely safe, but with at least a fighting chance for life, the *China Girl* found some slight respite from the terror and the menace of that brutal hurricane.

THE SHIP, indeed, was riding now more easily than Tyson had dared hope. Having lost her upper spars, and being somewhat held by the sea anchor to windward, this notably relieved her. Though she might still drift to southward, her rate would be far slower. The break up of the gale was meantime due. That gale had now already outlasted all reason, even for the roaring Horn.

Some change was bound to come. For the moment, considering the hopelessness of their outlook only a few hours before, they found themselves in a comparatively favorable position.

"And there's the current to reckon on, too," thought Tyson. "It sets northerly here. The bergs prove *that*. So much to the good for us, that current is!"

Isora had not yet left the deck. Now she was standing by the weather rail, closely watching the motion of the ship, keeping an eye to windward on the improvised sea anchor as it wallowed in those leaping and furious seas. The anchor seemed drifting but slowly. Her idea, her inspiration, had obviously succeeded.

Tyson made his way to her. His thoughts were blent of strange confusions, wonderment, realization that this girl was of a type hitherto unknown to him, an extraordinary type whose existence till now he had regarded as sheerly outside the realms of possibility. He felt neither shame nor jealousy that the girl, not he, had hit upon the plan whereto they owed their lives. In her slender body, he recognized, dwelt sea sense, the sailor's eye and brain, to a rare degree. None could deny that. Tyson was the last in the world who would.

Once and for all, the ancient superstition so current at sea that a woman brings bad luck aboard a ship, was laid. Her knowledge, skill, originality, resource seemed to him—as indeed they

were — little short of the miraculous.

"We're still on top!" he sang out lustily to her, against the turmoil of the hurricane. "We're still alive, and what's more now we've got a fighting chance."

"You've saved her," she answered, smiling. Admiration shone from her beautiful and dark eyes. "Glorious seamanship—and you've saved her!"

At this Tyson blankly stared from beneath frosted brows. Could it be possible Isora was giving him the credit? Or was she mocking him? Her voice, though, held nothing but sincerest praise. She seemed wholly to have forgotten her own part in the tremendous task; but Tyson was no man to let her thus forget.

"Who saved her?" he demanded in astonishment. "If it hadn't been for you—I didn't think of it, probably never would have. No denying that! You saved the ship, sir! *You*, by God!"

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORY

TWELVE days had fagged their weary length along, since the *China Girl* had cast off from her sea anchor and made her final bid for the Horn. The barometer, which had begun to rise a little shortly thereafter, had truly presaged the end of the terrific northwest gale. As the wind had diminished, it had hauled steadily into the north, leaving a heavy sea, as usual in those desolate ocean vastnesses.

Taking advantage of this shift of wind, the old square rigger, lame, crippled, broken but still afloat and carrying on, had beaten westward again, laying a long board on the starboard and a short one on the port tack. Thus had she won her way back to Drake Strait, the only latitude in the world where open water, with no interfering land, circles the entire globe. Thus had she battled sturdily to northward of Diego Ramirez. And now on her starboard beam, Hermit Island reared its black and spray drenched ugliness, like some sea monster of the mighty deep that had surged to the surface for breath; Hermit Island, whose grim and grisly southern tip is savage old Cape Horn itself.

Under scanty canvas, tattered and rent, the ship passed, head reaching westward to the mighty and longed for Pacific, the entrance into which would complete her passage round the roaring Horn. Greatly had she and all aboard her suffered in those cruel days and still more cruel nights.

The ship herself bore almost the appearance of a derelict. Every spar and yard above the topmast heads was gone, along with the end of the jibboom and all the headgear. The forecastle head was stove in; the anchors working through the deck planking; canvas again and again blown to rags; bulwarks burst, shattered and riven for two thirds the length of the ship along her topsides. Yet she was still carrying on, making shift with topsails and courses, the only canvas she now could spread—barely enough to let her forge her toilsome way against the long black rollers of the Horn.

What seas! Seas like nothing of their kind to be found elsewhere on the face of the mighty waters. Gigantic, terrifying, in endless succession night and day—surges that to the bitter end test the courage, skill and fortitude of the mariner!

That all these had been proved and found worthy was evidenced by the fact that not only was the old windjammer afloat, but that also day and night with little respite her men still labored at the eternal pumps. Thus had they kept her alive and still battling to westward, with hopes revived.

What men, in what a world! A world deserted by all but the wandering albatross soaring against black clouds driven before Antarctic gales; by Cape pigeons and tiny ghost petrels; by the Mother Carey's chickens of nautical tradition, that came to revel under the plunging counter of the storm swept vessel. A world of waters abandoned by all but the quaint penguin and the humpbacked southern whale.

Gaunt, haggard and whiskered were these men, with raw and swollen hands, red rimmed eyes, feet numbed by eternal deluges of icy seas; wrists and forearms hideously peppered with sea boils where brine soaked oilskins had chafed the flesh to the quick, without hope of healing. Men who had begun to lose their hair, parboiled right out of their scalps by the unending drench. Men who seemed battered and beaten to a pulp, but who still lived and fought, despite the elemental furies that momentarily threatened their destruction. Men who, in the very jaws of death, had fought their way out, and now were verily in sight of the roaring Horn that had wrought them such woe unutterable. What men, indeed!

A sadly diminished crew they were, worn down with insensate labor at pumps, yards and braces, and with the unending drill of "'boutship". For after the *China Girl* had so narrowly escaped from her dance with death, she had days and nights on end, been forced repeatedly to tack or wear; each maneuver a muscle racking, heart breaking agony of toil and suffering.

No one had escaped such labor, except those with injuries that had bound them to the drenched and dubious shelter of the spare cabins, aft. Antoon had been laid low with a shattered hip; he would never walk again as others walked. The Scorpion's gashed scalp had been but an outward indication of the brain concussion that still plunged him in stupefaction. Jubal Tabry's broken arm had begun to show signs of mortification. Stackhouse still worked, with what feeble help he could give, one armed. As for the negro, shot through the leg, he could even now only dot and carry one by handing himself along with sheer torment.

Every one aboard was half starved to death, foremast hands and after guard, alike.

Only the sketchiest kind of cookery had been contrived on the cabin bogey; some days, none at all. The galley with all its utensils had long since been utterly demolished, even the range having been hurled from its bed and catapulted through the bulwarks by the infuriate seas. Hot coffee now and then had become more a luxury to be hoped for and dreamed of than achieved. A sorry ship's company, that was, on an almost total wreck. But still, such as could stand to it, sweating, toiling on for the one dearest prize of all—just life itself.

WHAT of Leadspitter now?

This, of Leadspitter. That worthy still lay, red headed, huge and hulking in his damp and tumbled bunk. Unshaven, evil tempered, malignant, there he still remained, his leg but slowly mending. The frightful punishment that the *China Girl* had taken had done that leg scant good.

There he lay, trapped and helpless, cursing and snarling at the evil fate that had befallen him, the vanishing of all his golden dreams, the menace that awaited him in port if ever the old ship made port at all.

"Grand larceny, murder, that's what that son of a pup said he'd charge me with," Leadspitter was brooding, as the vessel at last came reaching along abreast of the roaring Horn and to southward of it. "Grand larceny! Murder! And what he's forelayin' to do, he'll *do*, by Judas Priest!"

Leadspitter swore vividly, shaking with cold in his wet and freezing cabin, a sorry object indeed.

"I'm goin' to the devil as fast as a full head of sail 'll drive me, no two ways about that. I'm on a lee shore o' trouble an' can't never claw off it. Old Bohannon, he's the lucky one. He's gone a'ready. Can't nothin' hurt him now. But if *I* ain't bound for hell, it's 'cause there ain't no such place!"

He pondered blackly for awhile, then added—

"If the damn' ship had only foundered, or if I'd only had the nerve to cut my throat . . . "

Thus he lay bitterly mulling his broth of hate and fear over slow coals of torment. Visions of a steel barred cell, even perhaps of the grim gallows' shadow or

the grimmer electric chair, companioned his pain.

A knock sounded at his door.

"Who the devil—"

"It's me, sir," answered Peter Mayes, former second mate of the *China Girl*. Mayes entered with his arm in a sling, his shoulder bulked and bandaged. "Sure, I just thought I'd drop in for a bit of a gam an' smoke with you, like, you bein' such good company, in a manner of speakin'."

"All right, come in an' be damned to you an' your soft soap, too! What you wantin', eh? Somethin', I'll be bound!" growled Leadspitter. "Spill it!"

Peter Mayes carefully closed the door, sat him down on a stool and braced himself against the pitching buck of the ship. Chop fallen, unshaven, starved and wan, he looked a very different Irishman from the somewhat dapper fellow who had aforetime tried to gallant it with Isora.

"Got a fill o' 'baccy, sir?" he asked "Mine's all out."

Leadspitter jerked an unseemly thumb at a whittled plug on the shelf above his head. Peter Mayes opened a clasp knife with his teeth, held the plug down on his knee and painfully chipped off a pipeful. Charging his pipe and firing it with one hand was an onerous job, but Peter seemed in no hurry. When smoke was going, the Irishman asked—

"You'll stand by me, sir, when we make port?"

"Think we're goin' to make port?"

Peter Mayes nodded.

"A man as done what that devil's whelp done, clawin' off the ice and beatin' back to the Horn, faith, he'd take this one through hell an' back. I'll need a good word or two from you, sir, when we're faced with court work, an' all. It's a near scoop we're up against. A hard case; damn' hard!"

Leadspitter only grunted:

"Well, what's your proposition? Show your colors!"

"I know you ain't wastin' no love on me, but you might gi' me a word as how I wasn't never too rough on the crew. How I got shot, too, defendin' the ship—an' you. Scratch my back, sir, an' I'll scratch yours. Sure, an' I will, that."

"What d'you mean?" Leadspitter's evil eye brightened with perhaps a gleam of hope.

"Hé, you don't know, o' course!" Peter gibed on a different tone. "Innocent as the babe unborn, ain't you? But—" and his voice lowered as he bent nearer—"but there's things been said. Old Abey Buzzard's been talkin'. They're talkin', too, 'mongst the men. A man 'll hear things. I been hearin' 'em, that's what I have!"

"What things? Slack your sheets, an' let 'em run!"

"About how Bohannon bore up for hell with somebody I could name givin' him a good shove off, too." The Irishman's tone grew acidulous. "Somebody!"

LEADSPITTER twisted up and clutched the Irishman's good arm. Devil's tattoos of panic had suddenly begun beating all their drums in his heart, but still he kept a front of menace.

"If you're meanin' *me*, damn you . . . !"

Peter smote the grasping hand away. The commerce between these two grew swiftly sordid.

"Let's talk turkey!" he threw at Leadspitter. "Your wit an' the wool of a blue dog, sure, they'd make a fine pair. But I ain't such a fooley. I had to be humble as dirt, when you was on top; but you ain't on top now, no, nor never will be again. You're low, now, lower 'n whale tracks on the bottom. Huggin' the lee side o' trouble, that's you! You've come down by the run, Leadspitter, an' if you want to keep me from spillin' the wind out o' my sails, in court, you got to slip me a nice little wad o' cash, that's what."

"Blackmail, eh?" Leadspitter tried to laugh, with some pretense of bluff amusement; but it rang horribly false. Up out of the turbid dregs of guilt came swirling a very great and deadly panic. "I'll see you in hell first!"

"That's where you're routed, all O. K.," the Irishman retorted. "Jail or the

gallows—they'll gulp you like a whale does a herrin'. You got to keep your weather eye liftin' now, old man, or you're on the rocks. You're needin' all the friends you can get. I'll be one—for a consideration."

"What I'll give *you* will be a busted neck, you—"

"Tell that to the leprechauns!" And Peter laughed poisonously as the old ship groaned and creaked her gale tormented way.

"I'll learn you to come blackmailin'—"

"Yeh, sure! You'll learn your grandmother to milk ducks!" the Irishman flung bitter persiflage. "Well, le' me tell you one thing, an' that ain't two. If you don't count me in on a good bite o' your pickin's, and a bit over, I'll jump Tyson's way an' help him swear you to the noose, s'help my God!"

Leadspitter breathed out a mangled oath, fell back in his bunk, fair chittered at the Irishman with lips that grinned in rage and panic, revealing broken and yellow teeth:

"You—you wouldn't swear away an innocent man's life! Peter, look here, we been good friends! We been close—"

"So's my shirt close, but faith, my skin's closer. It's money I want, an' money I'm goin' to have out o' you, or—"

"Money? Where the hell would I get money?" Leadspitter deprecated. "I'm a poor man! I ain't got—"

"Oh, no, you ain't got nothin'!" retorted Peter sapiently. "You lost some, I know, in that there manus. But you got some more laid by. Trust you for that. You, with your dirty fingers in Bohannon's cash, an' the girl's, too! You got flakes o' money hid away, somewheres, an' you're goin' to split with me, too, so I'll go your friend an' help save your bacon. Get me, do you?"

"An' if, by Judas Priest, I can't give you nothin'? If I ain't got it, can't get it—"

"Then you're out o' luck, that's all. It's blowin' a whole storm, for you. I ain't wastin' no love on you, Leadspitter!" And Peter emitted thick smoke. "But we might higgle up some kind of a deal. If you're anyways wishful to go on livin'—"

"I tell you I ain't *got* it!" protested Leadspitter, stone eyed and livid. "But later, I might—could—"

"No, sir! You ain't goin' to pay me with no shake o' the foresheet. All the trick an' truck I'll have with you is on a cash bottom. Palaverin' won't do you no good. You're in a jam as'd scare the wits out of a cuttlefish, old boy. Tyson's goin' to start things when he makes port, an' you can lay to that solid. You're all wrote down in his rough book, mister! An'—"

"Peter, Peter, me an' you been friends, ain't we? You'll stand by me an' swear I never—"

"C-a-s-h!" spelled the Irishman, rubbing forefinger and thumb together. "So you better get things stowed an' safe with me as your star witness. With me swearin' till all's blue, in your favor, mebbe Tyson can't get the inside o' you. I might save you, easy as I'd reef a sail. But with me aginst you, you'll get the go by. Saints above, what a figger you'll cut with a rope's end round that there bull neck o' yours! Eh, Leadspitter, old shipmate?"

"Save me? Could you, if I—if I paid for it?"

"Slick as pins! Ah, that's more like, now. Faith, I *knew* you had some swag tucked away, somewheres. So take a round turn on your gab, an' let's get to brass tacks. How much am I offered fer to help you fig up a charge o' mutiny aginst this here Tyson dog's whelp, as'll discredit him in court? An' then help swear angel's wings on *you?* How much?" The Irishman's face assumed pleased expectancy. "How much, eh?"

"Listen, Peter," groaned the crippled man. He extended a hand undeft in supplication, but now trembling. "I'm brought low, that's what I am. Hell's bells, yes! But I'm proper grateful to a friend. You prove it wasn't me as done Bohannon's business for him, and I—I'll—"

"Yeh? How much?"

"When we get through with this damn'

foreigneerin', and back home to the good old U. S. A., I'll see you don't lose nothin'!"

"Sa-a-ay! Avast, there! No credit, see? It's a C. O. D. job, an' now that we're talkin' wireless, it's likewise P. D. Q., with you sendin' out an S. O. S.! Get me?"

"Peter, old friend, this here's pretty damn' tough, on the heel of my gettin' stove up, and all. Honest to Christ, man, I'm as bare o' coin as an egg is of whiskers! But—"

"Ah, rats!" retorted Peter. "If the fool killer was to come aboard, you'd have to hide. Say, you might just as well reach for the moon as try to get me for a credit job. Cash, Leadspitter, cash!"

"But if I ain't *got* it—"

With a flare of sudden and passionate rage at this unexpected recrudescence of poor mouthed pleading, the Irishman jumped to his feet.

"Yes or no?" he demanded. "Which is it? You cough up, or hang."

"Peter, Peter! Listen! I'll take my 'davy, swear on a stack o' Bibles—"

Bitterly Mayes laughed.

"There ain't no stack o' Bibles in this world as high, then, as the gallus you'll be dancin' on, damn your black, murderin', penny pinchin' soul! Faith, an'—"

"Peter! You wouldn't see an old shipmate hang?"

"Wouldn't I, then? Ha-ha! Sure, if I have to walk ten thousand miles to get there, it's me as 'll be at the festivities. The sole o' me foot an' the back o' me hand to you, ye murderin' spalpeen, an' may the Old Boy fly away with ye entirely!"

Wherewith, in highest dudgeon, the Irishman flung out of the cabin, crashed the door to, and left the doomed Leadspitter to blasphemous and terror stricken agonies.

AT THIS same hour, very far away, another man was suffering too with torments of the damned. This man was Jason Mellish, owner of the *China Girl*.

In a cooking blaze of Buenos Aires sun, old Jason was sitting on a bale of hides at the end of the Michanovich Pier, looking far out across the harbor and the Plata River toward the islands of Forallon and San Gabriel, and beyond them the low blue haze of the Uruguay coast.

Pellucid air, soft breathing waters, white clouds of gulls noisily flashing and circling, schooners and tramps and liners and all the busy come and go of the great river seemed for Jason Mellish to mean less than nothing. Hunched down, farspent in strength, with something like a mist of blood that ever floated, wove and mocked before his dimming, steel spectacled eyes, he waited, watching for a ship that never came.

A shrunken and oddly huddled figure he made there, incurious and patient, his brooding thoughts bitterly unspiced by any hope, his brain more than a little touched. Upon that brain the letter that Bohannon had venomously left for him had fallen like a saber stroke. That letter had slashed something, wounded something in him, to the death. Something that never could find anodyne on earth. Cozen his conscience how he might, old Jason felt the blood mist clotting, too, upon his hands. And whose blood might that be? With fallen jaw that dribbled in swift come senility, he muttered—

"The only one—the only one I ever loved—"

And then he laughed, and that laugh sounded like the laugh of a walnut cracked between two stones; and then he stared seaward again, picking at his fingers, plucking at his pale lips. He smeared the dribble from his white bristled and unshaven chin, and once more fell a-peering.

"There's a rummy old bloke fer you, Joe," remarked one of a brace of British seamen leaning over the rail of the rusty *Hampton Castle*, tied up alongside the Michanovich Pier. "Comes 'ere every day, 'e do, just at the turn o' the arfternoon an' sets starin' and gloomin' black as tar. Got eyes on 'im like a b'iled hake. Seems like 'e eyn't 'is own

man at all. Gorn off 'is blinkin' chump, wot?"

"Blimy, yus!" Joe assented. "H'outward bound, that's wot 'e is!"

And Joe squinted at old Jason, whose crouched figure was streaked with thin shadows of ratlines, in that staring sunlight. Joe scratched a convivial bottle nose and spat a great deal of tobacco juice over the rail.

"'E's an ole ship as all winds is foul to, that 'un! Seems like 'e's wytin' fer somethink or somebody as is diamonds to 'im—an' as don't never come. 'Oo the 'ell *is* 'e, d'ye know?"

"Oh, some bloke was tellin' me 'e's a New York ship owner as come down 'ere expectin' fer to meet one of 'is wessels. But she's lost at sea, or somethink. 'E's been fair pesterin' the life out o' the port authorities fer news o' her, but all they can give 'im is *manyanner*—mebbe. 'E's tykin' it 'ard, Joe. Crool 'ard, s'help me!"

"Don't 'e never s'y nothink to nobody?"

"Bleedin' little! One time I says to 'im, 'Ello, guv'nor, wot you wytin fer, eh?' says I. That's wot I arsks 'im, an'—"

"An' wot did 'e s'y?"

"Not much. All 'e does is look at me emptylike, an' s'y—

"'You eyn't my nevvy, are you?'

"'No,' says I. 'I eyn't, not wotever. Wot nevvy?'

"'Lor' bless me,' says 'e, 'it's wonderful 'ard. It's proper 'ard,' says 'e, 'for an ole man all alone in the world!' 'e says.

"Balmy is wot that there ole bloke is, an' gettin' balmier. 'E'll croak, I'm thinkin', inside a fortnit. *'E* won't larst long! Ah well, every herrin's got to 'ang by its own tyle. 'E eyn't nothink to *us*. Give us a match, Joe. Thanky."

THE SHIP that, true enough, now nevermore would enter Buenos Aires harbor, was drawing past the pitch of storm battered old Cape Horn. Now she was leaving that gigantic and formidable barrier, heading on a slant that soon would bring her, ease her, into the longed for rest of the Pacific.

Already she was forever abandoning that grim, four thousand foot crag, its peaks capped with crests of glacial snow, its treeless, naked black rock heaving up into dark violet bulges of windy cloud.

Isora and Tyson, on the *China Girl's* quarter-deck, could with binoculars still descry the tempest chiseled juts and gullies of the Horn, stenciled with streaks of ice eternal, around which gales forever scream with maniac fury of ten million demons. Cruelly sharp, the Rock up jutted sullen and menacing from league long gray seas boiling over into tremendous swirls; ravening, breaching across hungry hidden reefs that slung aloft the liquid smoke of bursting combers.

White yeast of surfs afoam shot up those terrible buttresses where foot of man could never tread. Miles of frothing overfalls and wild horse plunging surges whipped the sea to fury, mingled their cascading foam feathers with the myriad screams of skua gulls and petrels.

Infinitely desolate, gladdened by no caressing touch of verdure, beautiful only in its cosmic terror and loneliness, slowly the roaring Horn dropped astern. Unwillingly it faded through cold shivering veils of mist, gray milky shadows, dimly empurpled vapors.

"A bad corner of the world, that," judged Tyson.

Worn down, thin of cheek and deep lined with fatigue, in oilskins storm blown and washed threadbare, he made a rugged figure of a fighting man. His hands that gripped the binoculars were cracked and raw with brine.

"A bad corner, but we're round it now. Barometer's rising. Wind serves—in a way. A rare spell, for the Horn! It'll hold, I reckon, long enough for us to weather Hoste Island."

"That means," Isora queried, "we'll reach into the Pacific, then?"

He lowered his glass and nodded.

"Yes. No fear we'll fail on that, now."

"And make Valparaiso?"

"Hardly! I'm not even going to try for it. Not the way we're stove up, leaking and all. Talcahuano, in Conception Bay—that'll be good enough. We can find

pretty much everything we need for relief, there. But anyhow—"

"Yes?"

"Anyhow, we've put this infernal old chopping tray round the Horn!"

Isora kept silent, looked far away at the fading barrier between the two great oceans, cemetery of ships and lives innumerable. Her eyes, so deep a sapphire that they verged on black, seemed brooding. Around her cheek, thinner than othertime, the cold wind wantoned with her hair. Her oilskins hinted at the warm and plastic fulness of her breast. Those storm beaten garments and the sou'wester knotted under the winsome firm curve of her chin gave her the look of a true viking's daughter.

"No man given to wine, women and song could have done this miracle," she presently murmured.

"No man given to wine, women and song *did* do it!" he answered. "Not this time, anyhow. Bohannon's testimony and Leadspitter's—well, take them for what they're worth!"

"Yes, I'm doing just that," she told him simply, her eyes more lustrous. "I'm throwing them out of court. Supermen can't be so foolish as to let any such nonsense run away with them."

"Who's a superman?" he laughed. "No epithets, sir!"

"Well, sir—" and a subtle witchery lay in her tone—"if I choose to think so, sir—"

"How about superwomen, then? Only a superwoman could have stood up to it, done her full half of it, perhaps more!"

At this she fell silent again. The stars in their courses, and the power that rules the stars, seemed bringing these twain together with a resistless might that moved in calm, sure purposes which man and woman never shall oppose.

Isora's hand lay on the old ship's rough and battered rail. Now Tyson's hand touched it, felt it tremble.

"No superwoman at all," she smiled a little wistfully. "Just a woman, like all women. I'd rather be just that. Always a sailor's daughter, though. Always in love with the sea!"

"Yes, I understand. I love it too."

A lance of infinitely distant sun, piercing inky cloud masses, glinted on the gigantic rolling vastnesses beyond which lay more friendly promise of the Pacific.

Tyson's hand closed on Isora's. A silent eloquence of blood flushed her cheek.

"And sometime?" he asked. "Sometime, perhaps—"

"My captain!" she answered as a viking's daughter should. "My captain, now and forever mine!"

THE END

A Story of the Road Builders

The HALLS of LEARNING

By GUTHRIE BROWN

JOHN BONNER drew his horse to a stop and listened in growing astonishment, not unmixed with mirth. A shriek of blistering invective shattered the serenity of the afternoon. That in itself was arresting enough, but the tirade was delivered in a youthful treble that shook on the edge of tears. Moreover, some of the terms were new even to John, after twelve years of road building.

The shriek suddenly changed quality, with the tone of a pup's lament on the brink of chastisement. John hastened around the bend of the hill and nearly fell into the boom of an excavator that stood across the road. Two figures struggled furiously in the shadow of the bank. John was out of his saddle promptly and in a couple of strides reached the combatants and pulled them apart.

In his left hand he held an undersized boy of fifteen or sixteen years who gazed up at him in round eyed amazement. His right palm was flat against the breast of the hairiest, most unattractive looking individual whom John had ever seen. Little eyes glared out at him from beneath a thatch of tangled hair, while a vast paw clawed at the restraining hand. The clawing dwindled as the man met the clear steadiness of

John's eyes. The boy, from the shelter of the protecting arm, made violent faces at his late antagonist.

"That will be enough of that," remarked John; and when the boy had retired, abashed, "What were you two quarreling about?"

The boy explained vociferously that he had climbed up to the end of the boom to oil a pulley and old Sept got mad and yanked him off and—

"I don' want my machine all gummed up," the hairy man contended sullenly.

"Did you bring in the shovel?" John asked him.

The man nodded, and the boy looked up at John eagerly.

"Gosh! I bet you're the big boss, ain't you? Gurley said you might be here today. Gosh!" He looked John up and down in open admiration. "I bet you can swat 'em! I bet—"

"Are you his helper?" John interrupted.

"Yeh! Gurley give me that job and I'm gonna learn to run the shovel, only Stan wants to learn first and Sept here, he won't teach nobody. He's just so damned ornery he won't—"

"You go down the road—" John stopped the flow again—"and tell Gurley I'll be along pretty soon."

"I'd like to show you—" the suggestion was respectfully tentative—"how good I can work the trip—and things."

John smiled.

"You'll have plenty of chance to show me, son. Take my horse, will you? I'll walk down."

The boy rode away in swimmy pride and as slowly as was compatible with motion at all. Such rare privilege was a thing to be savored to the last possible second of delight.

JOHN'S glance returned to the patently uneasy man beside him. Something about him had caught the interest of the road boss. John tried to find out what it was as the two went over the machine together and he asked questions and manifested an appreciation that should have won response from a stone. But the man Sept seemed all but inarticulate. He replied only in monosyllables and eyed the other furtively when he thought he wasn't observed.

"Your grade's a bit too flat," John told him. "You want to slope it in a little. Like this."

He drew an envelope and pencil from his pocket and made a diagram. Sept bent close to watch.

"Here's your bank," and John wrote the word along the line. "Here's your inside ditch, here's the edge of your grade—sixteen feet in the clear." John looked up with a smile. "If you're a good shovel man there will need to be mighty little picking up after you."

There was no telling from Sept's narrowed lids as he studied the diagram whether he was really interested or whether he did it to keep from looking at the boss. It was quitting time and in the half mile walk down to camp, John tried again. Had it been a hard trip in with the shovel?

"No."

Did he have any trouble getting under the newly constructed telephone line? If John remembered rightly, the line swung pretty low where it crossed the road in a place or two.

"No."

Was this Sept's first trial at road work?

"Yes."

John gave it up with a grin at himself for his failure.

GURLEY, foreman of one of the three crews John Bonner was using to build the new road from the Quintere mine to the railroad at Melrose, heaved a sigh of relief as he put his feet on a table and lighted a pipe.

"I'm sure glad you're here, John. Drop the flap, will you? Nights are getting chilly. I didn't know," Gurley continued, "what arrangement you had made with Laestro and I didn't want to ball things up by firing Sept. But now we can get rid of him."

"What's the matter with him?" asked John.

"Great Scott, man, you've seen him!"

"Just his looks?"

"Isn't that enough? But if it isn't there's plenty else. I've had more grief in the four days he's been here than in two months before. In the first place he won't teach Stanley to run the shovel, as I told him to."

"What does he do?"

"Do? He doesn't do anything. He just lets Stan alone, that's all—won't answer a question or tell a thing or let him touch a lever."

"How did he act with you?"

"Told me," Gurley choked with disgust, "that I wasn't the boss. Some blithering idiot had let it slip that the big boss was up the road somewhere and Sept appears to have pinned his faith to you."

"No outward sign of it," remarked John.

"I suppose not," agreed Gurley. "He's a dumb oyster. Nobody would go on as his helper but Taney, and the kid is so crazy about the machine that he'll stand anything to get to work on it. But Sept won't let him do a thing except empty the bucket. What arrangement did you have with Laestro, John?"

"The operator was included in the rental of the machine for the first week. After that we pay him."

"Nothing about our keeping the man they send?"

"No."

Gurley became cheerful.

"Now our only problem is to get a man trained for the job. Stan is as wild about machinery as Taney is; neither of them seems to care what it is, so it has wheels and plenty of grease. They have taken an old flivver here apart twice and put it together again. Runs, too."

"Who is this Taney?" asked John.

"You've heard of Croton?"

John had heard of Croton, a dry farmer living far back in the hills and running a few lean cattle in the labyrinth of cañons that lace the foot of the Lost River Mountains.

"Taney is his oldest boy," explained Gurley. "The kid left the parental care—which I've understood isn't any too loving—last June and has been kicking about trying to make a living. He came to me for a job and I put him on as flunkey. He begged so hard for a team that I let him try it. Good hand. He almost died of anticipation before the shovel got here and now— Here he comes. Hello, kid."

Taney sidled through the tent door with a couple of books under his arm, worshipful eyes on John.

"Taney studies every night," said Gurley. "He's going to be a mechanic. He comes in here because the men in his tent make too much noise."

WHEN John sat down beside the boy and corrected his arithmetic paper and gave him his spelling lesson and criticized favorably his drawing of an ignition system, Taney's cup brimmed over. From sheer happiness he was quite as dumb as Sept, and he went forth into the night, treading on air.

"He'll make the grade," nodded John. "You've given him a great boost, Gurley."

Gurley did not answer. It was in his heart that men who worked under John Bonner for any length of time sort of got in the habit of lending a hand. But he could not find words for his feeling.

A sudden wild uproar from a neighboring tent burst upon their ears. The onslaught of sound was so unexpected, seeming to demand such instant response, that both John and Gurley were on their feet and outside before action in the disturbed area had fairly begun.

Gurley stepped into the light of an open tent door to receive a sprawling bundle about his knees with such force that he tripped and pitched headlong. John, aiming for the entrance, was astride the struggling bodies when he caught a hurtling mass of arms and legs full in the chest. The assault did not upset him, but the human missile had no more than dropped to the ground when another

followed it, catching him exactly on the diaphragm.

John lost no time getting under the canvas, but the war was over. The ammunition was exhausted.

In the middle of the tent stood Sept, head and shoulders dripping with water, chest heaving from his exertions, eyes glaring with a queer, wild bafflement. That was the thing that engaged John's attention, not the shifting, furious glance, but the suggestion of puzzled dismay back in the little eyes.

A voice outside in the darkness was explaining to Gurley that they had just played a bit of a joke on the silly nut! Couldn't a man take a joke that there wasn't any harm in? He wasn't the only fellow who'd ever tripped a bucket of water on himself coming through a door! Why, yes, they'd laughed, of course. Who wouldn't? And God knew the water wasn't wasted. This last with special vindictiveness.

John walked back to Gurley's tent without having opened his mouth. He wanted to laugh and he didn't dare. He suspected that if Gurley caught him laughing he might have some difficulty explaining himself. Gurley was not strong in a sense of humor when the humoree was himself.

THE FOREMAN was surprised when John made no move the following day to have Sept teach Stanley to use the shovel. John spent an hour or so watching Sept work, made two or three suggestions, praised Taney's handling of the trip and devoted the remainder of the time to setting grade stakes and doing some badly needed repair work. Gurley had lost his blacksmith the week before and John welded scraper bails and plow points and forged new links for broken log chains and set shovel handles and shod horses for four days.

That first afternoon Gurley came to him with a dark face. The cook had seen Sept come out of Gurley's tent in the morning after the foreman had left camp.

"He was quick and he was sneaking about it, the cook said, looking all around him and bolting for the timber."

Gurley was plainly upset.

"John, you aren't thinking of keeping that gorilla on the job?"

"Well, Gurley, I don't know. Did you miss anything?" At Gurley's negative John went on thoughtfully, "I have always wanted something pretty definite when I fired a man. Sept handles that bucket as if it were a hand and I believe he has some eye for grade. Of course the work is new to him, but why not give him a trial?"

Gurley did not look up with his usual frank responsiveness. He didn't like Sept. He thoroughly and violently didn't like him. Privately he termed him a gutter rat. He couldn't understand John in this matter. Gurley was the man who had to work with Sept. He never before had seen John fail to recognize and allow for such an obvious fact.

"You may think it is just prejudice with me," he defended himself, "but such a man is a bad thing for a crew. You know that as well as I do. They'll be trying something else on him pretty soon and that'll mean fights. I got a darned good crew here and I don't want it all shot to hell by a goof who doesn't know what soap and shears are for."

"That's a point," admitted John, "but what has Sept done to cause trouble, really, except throw those three men out doors? You or I would have done the same thing in his place—if we had been able." John suppressed a smile. "You may be right, Gurley, but let's wait a little."

NEARLY out of breath with excitement, Taney slipped into the foreman's tent that evening. Sept had been seen to sneak a lantern out of the barn and go off up the road with it. To Taney this appeared to be matter for solemn consideration and Gurley was hardly behind him in interest. John didn't catch fire. Sept probably knew what he was about. A man's time was

his own out of working hours. John got the boy at his studies and his mind off the matter. Not so Gurley. He went out, ostensibly for matches, but John knew he went to investigate.

His walk up through the dark to the shovel yielded the foreman little. Light shone through the cracks between the curtains of the cab. These had been dropped and Gurley had some trouble getting a line on the man within. Sept sat with his chin in his hand, elbow on crossed knees, eyes vacant. Gurley watched for some time, but the "gorilla" did not move. It was cold out there and Gurley finally retired, baffled and out of humor.

When the sound of the foreman's retreat had faded, the man Sept moved quickly enough.

The following night the shovel man again left camp with his lantern. When he returned, a tent mate surreptitiously looked at his watch. It was two o'clock.

Gurley chafed. He hated mysteries on general principles and he hated them specifically in his crew. They generated suspicion and uneasiness or an equally pernicious excitement. The whole thing was getting on his nerves. He was amazed at John's passivity in the matter. John generally lost no time reaching a decision. He might feel sorry for Sept, but that didn't build roads. There still remained that unexplained invasion of the foreman's tent. There was something deucedly wrong somewhere.

John put in a telephone call one afternoon when the men were all out at work. He asked for Laestro and Company at Hobart Junction and particularly for a certain McNair. He got his man in half an hour.

"Hello, John. You haven't broken down already?"

"Machine's all right, Mac. What I want is a little dope on the man you sent with it."

"Who is it?"

"Sept is his name."

"What! They didn't send you Sept?"

"That's the man."

McNair hesitated, then—

"I'll call you again in a little while, John."

An hour later they were once more in communication.

"John, I owe you an apology. I have been East and I wasn't here when the machine went out. The shop foreman sent Sept with it because he wanted to get rid of him."

"Why?" asked John.

"Well, the fellow isn't liked, is all I know."

"Has he been there long?"

"A couple of years, about."

"Machinist?"

"No-o. Just helper about the shop."

John knew what that meant. It meant doing all the dirty, disagreeable jobs that other workmen shirked, and doing them for half pay.

"He has asked for a year," continued McNair, "to go out with a shovel, and the shop foreman said that he'd made up his mind that if they ever sent one to a spot God forsaken enough, they'd ship Sept with it. I just explained to the foreman that you might work at the jumping off place, but that you were a friend of mine. We'll send you a new man right away to teach somebody to run the machine, and you can let Sept out."

McNair was not prepared for John's next words.

"Got any record of Sept before he came to you?"

"Well—no—not exactly. He knocked around the country picking up odd jobs until he went into our shop. Mother's dead and father's a jailbird."

"Can he have his job there again, if I let him go?"

McNair hesitated, and John was convinced of what he had suspected, that the shop foreman would not take Sept back.

"We'll find something for him, John. I have a good man here I'll start this afternoon. Can you meet him?"

"Let it ride a few days, Mac. I'd rather not make a change right now. I'll call you if I want the new man."

John hung up while McNair in Hobart Junction scratched his head perplexedly.

JOHN stood among the tents of the deserted camp and cogitated. He had not been able to get it clear in his own mind why he was reluctant to make a move against the man Sept. He only knew that something seemed to stop him, even when he realized that the work quite possibly might suffer from his failure to act. That night, however, his hand was very nearly forced.

He and Gurley were checking up the month's expense account for the camp when young Stanley walked in. His pale face was smeared with blood from an ugly gash over his eyes and he was literally shaking with fury. Taney dropped his spelling book with a squeak of horror and Gurley rose slowly. John did not move.

"I got them," said Stanley to Gurley, "and he took them away from me."

Gurley started toward the door. John's quiet voice stopped him.

"Just a minute, Gurley. Sit down, Stan. Taney, get a basin of warm water and a clean cloth. Now," when the boy had gone, "what's this about?"

Gurley answered in hardly suppressed rage, looking at John with an expression utterly unlike his usual open friendliness.

"I told Stan to get the book of instructions and plates and parts book that Sept had. We knew he kept them under his mattress. Stan could learn a lot from them. John, if you think I—"

"What did he do?" John asked Stanley.

"I was sitting in my tent," the young man answered, "and had just opened up the instruction book when Sept walked in. He snatched up the papers—and, of course, I fought. But he's as strong as a bull."

John nodded. Taney came with the basin and John washed and bound Stanley's cut so quickly and comfortably that the patient smiled his gratitude. John turned to Taney.

"Ask Sept to come here. Tell him—" John stopped the boy in the doorway—"that I want to see him. Don't say anything else."

Taney nodded, a little frightened. The big boss could be stern.

WHEN Sept came into the tent his eyes sought and found John and did not thereafter leave him for so much as a glance at anything else. John was disturbed. The eyes had the same expression that Taney's sometimes had—an unconscious and complete faith in the adequacy of the boss. John was not a bit sure that he was adequate in this case. There was no bafflement in Sept's look tonight. He had the air of a man who stood upon his rights. John guessed intuitively that direct questioning would be worse than useless, that it would serve only to throw the man into confusion and put him on the defensive.

"You have hurt Stanley." John stated the fact in as colorless a tone as possible.

"He ain't got no business with my books." Sept spoke clearly and without hesitation.

"He wants to learn the shovel, too."

That was a shot in the dark. John was feeling his way toward the inner man of the dirty, uncouth creature before him. The shot told. Sept's glance wavered a little, then steadied upon John's. But he had no answer.

"Men have to work together." John spoke slowly, searching down into the eyes that did not flinch from his. "One man alone can't do much, but a lot of men together can do a big thing. They've got to care more about the whole big job than about their own little job."

John didn't know but what he had got out of the man's depth there. He waited, while Gurley looked on in angry silence. Young Stanley, however, was sensitive enough to get a glimpse of John's purpose.

"It's all I know."

Sept's voice was sullen and defensive. It was evident that further talk was futile. When he had gone, John offered no comment while the others discussed the matter. Finally he suggested:

"Better go to bed, Stan. You'll feel

like sin in the morning. I wouldn't try to work tomorrow. You go, too, Taney."

A few minutes after their exit Taney catapulted back into the tent gasping:

"Oo-oh! Somepin's happenin' at the waterin' trough!"

Something was indeed happening at the watering trough. One of the men of young Stanley's tent, who had not witnessed but had soon heard of Sept's reconfiscation of his "books", determined to take a hand. He was as heavy and as tall as the shovel man and he had not a particle of doubt of his ability to "teach the galoot a few manners".

After some search he located Sept near the barn. Just before the camp arrived in a body, Sept had been holding the reformer down by the ears in the full trough. The conqueror escaped in the confusion and the victim came up for air.

The general opinion seemed to be that the latest recipient of Mr. Sept's attentions had invited his own disaster. What business had he butting in, the men wanted to know. Also they were forced to give due respect to any man who was so fast a worker and so consistently victorious.

Gurley said nothing. He walked back to his tent and waited for John. When the road boss came, his foreman faced him with a touch of grimness.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet, Gurley."

Gurley was a little white about the mouth because what he had to say was hurting him.

"John, I've worked under you, off and on, for seven years, and this is the first time I ever knew you to do anything I couldn't back up. I've got to tell you flat—it's me or Sept. Take your choice."

Gurley turned away and sat prodding a heel into the dirt floor.

Through a long silence John did not move. Then he got up and walked out. Gurley knew that there wasn't anything final in that. It was simply John's habit to say nothing when there was nothing to say.

THE ROAD boss went to bed. He would sleep over the thing and maybe he could see his way out in the morning. But sleep refused to come. He tossed to and fro for several hours, gave up finally, dressed and went out. He was standing in the shadow of a piñon tree when he saw a man across the road, lift a tent flap and pass quietly from sight.

It was Sept. The idea occurred to John to call him out and try to talk with him. But second thought checked it. Sept had proved hopelessly mute every time he had been alone with the boss. John turned his steps toward the shovel, not because he expected any solution from it, but because nothing else occurred to him.

The machine was considerably farther from camp than it had been when John first arrived. Sept had been making good progress with it and his work was improving steadily. The last two hundred yards was finished road except for the loose stones to be raked off.

John walked around the shovel a couple of times. It looked just as it did when the men had quit work the evening before. The canvas curtains were rolled up, the lowered bucket rested full weight on the ground.

John stepped into the cab and struck a match. All orderly here. However Sept neglected his person, his machine was beyond reproach. Three or four dirty rags in a corner testified to use. The dust from the day's run had been removed from all working parts. Wherever there was grease it was clean grease.

John struck another match and moved farther in. His foot encountered some obstacle on the floor and he looked down. A block of scrap iron was set against the wall of the cab and a small piece of stained canvas under it appeared to cover something which the iron held in place. John sat on his heels and lifted the weight and the canvas. He sat so for some time, burning match after match as, with growing understanding and a stilled amazement, he examined what the canvas had concealed.

The last match went out.

"My God!" said John Bonner softly into the darkness.

GURLEY had slept little. Something had seemed to come loose in him when he delivered his ultimatum to John, something that for a long time had been part of him, almost fundamental. Gurley was one of those whose loyalty is hard bought and rests upon nothing less solid than the granite of character. He could not believe that it was John—the John he knew—who had allowed affairs to drift to such a pass. It was not credible that this man, whom he had seen meet the dangers and problems of their work with an unerring skill and with undeviating justice—it wasn't possible that he had let things come to an issue between a trusted foreman and a hoodlum stranger. But there it was.

Gurley had two men at work dredging and walling the spring that supplied the camp with water. He superintended that piece of work through most of the morning. He had not seen John. A little before noon he started up the road to look over the work, and met Bonner coming down.

"I was on my way to find you," said John directly. "Let's sit down here a minute, Gurley. I have something to show you."

On a flat stone John spread out an assortment of papers which at first Gurley viewed without understanding. As partial comprehension came to him, he looked up slowly at John, who smiled in response.

"Man, it's a knockout. I found them this morning, weighted down on the floor of the cab. He wasn't taking any chances by putting them under his mattress again."

"I—don't just—get it."

Gurley was turning the leaves of a book of specifications where an occasional word was heavily underlined with pencil.

"You see," said John, "he can't read or write and he's trying to learn. Look. This is what started him off," and he turned up the old envelope back on which he had sketched the diagram for Sept. "He has copied those few words I wrote there two or three hundred times apiece on that wrapping paper, and he's picked them out of the specifications and instructions—never missed one that I could find. I'm blessed if I can see how he connected up the printing and the writing."

John told Gurley of the talk with NcNair.

"You see why he'd fight for his job, the only chance he'd ever had. And here—" John touched the writing—"he was trying—well, trying to get where he'd be the equal of any man."

Gurley swore as softly as John had in the early morning dark.

"What's this?"

"One of Taney's spelling lessons. Lord knows how he got hold of that. Here's where he copied it."

"Gave that up," observed Gurley, whose mind was not slow, once it had found the track. "What *you* had written was the right way to do it."

Gurley grinned for the first time in almost a week. John's nearly illegible fist was a standing joke with every man who knew him. John grinned back.

"I hope he hasn't formed the habit. I tried to convince him that Taney is a much safer guide in penmanship than I am."

"You?"

John nodded.

"We'll go up there in a minute. Here's the last exhibit."

He took from his pocket a piece of a yellow lead pencil. Gurley looked at it.

"From my drawer!"

"Yes. He *had* to have a pencil, you see."

Gurley sat thoughtfully a minute, his arms about his knees. The shadow no longer stood between him and John. The intensity of his relief made his voice uncertain. At last he simply put out his hand. John grasped it as they rose.

"What about Stan?" asked Gurley.

"If you can spare him, I'll take him back with me and put him on the compressor up at No. 1."

The foreman nodded.

A LITTLE later, just at the noon hour, they stood in the shade of the excavator and listened to a conversation from the opposite side.

"Say it again," commanded Taney's voice.

Sept gave the alphabet, hesitating only slightly over the order of *p—q—r*.

"He's learned that while they worked this morning," whispered John.

Lunch buckets were shoved back into the cab and Taney announced:

"We got time for your spelling lesson before we go to work . . . *Road* . . . No, you don't make it that way. See—like this."

"But John does," objected Sept.

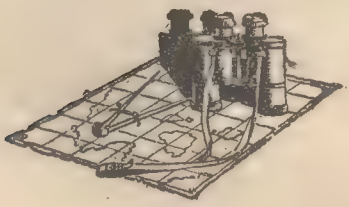
"I know," admitted Taney. "I'd—I'd like to do it like John, too. Only you know he told us he was a rotten writer and he won't like it if you don't make 'em the way he said."

The two behind the shovel retreated quietly.

"How did you do it?" asked Gurley.

"I didn't. Taney did it. I don't know how. But he was completely carried away with the idea of helping Sept when I explained things to him. A generous boy usually has a lot of tact. When I showed up they had already got as far as *k*." John hesitated. "It's going to be all right with you, Gurley?"

"I was wondering," said Gurley, "how I could offer to cut Sept's hair for him without making him sore."



It is a grim tale of the sea he tells, when

NEPTUNE SPEAKS

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

GOSSIPING wives of fishermen said he was a little off!

We of a more generous nature called him peculiar. Too old to lay keels in the shipyard, he had retired to a beachcomber's shack on the beach. There he lived! How? God only knows. How does any beachcomber live?

Often of an evening I have seen him sitting there watching the ships pass—vessels whose keels he had supervised laying. I was present when the *Aleut's* keel was laid. It was his last ship and you will recall her maiden voyage—lost with all hands after striking a rock.

It worried him a lot, partly because it was his last ship; partly because of the mystery of her sinking. He often said:

"The great tragedies of the sea are never told because no one survives. Only Neptune knows, and he won't speak."

Later on he qualified this somewhat. Evenings, he said, when the tide and moon were right; when it was still except for the soft voice of tiny waves breaking on clean sand, Neptune's daughter talked to him, but she spoke only of the beauty of the sea; never of the tragedy.

And then, one night, Neptune himself came—came without warning and, as if the burden of his story was too great to bear . . .

BECAUSE the lips of those who were aboard the steamer are now sealed in death, you ask me, Neptune, to speak?

Did not the diver who descended to the wreck tell what he saw? What silenced him? The story was there for him to read! Ah yes, perhaps the tragedy of it stilled his tongue. Perhaps . . .

I saw him descend! Then when he could remain below no longer he returned to the scow and his face was as pale as death when they removed his helmet—and he was a man hardened to the ways of the sea.

You say the sea is merciless?

Ah! But you don't know it as I know

it! It is man, not the sea, who is merciless. Did not the sea stop it all, stop the madness that even I, who have seen everything, turned from?

You recall how the ship struck? Yes? The weather was calm and the captain refused the chance to transfer his passengers to another steamer. Then the steamer that would have aided disappeared into the night and, without warning, the storm came.

It came with the roar and snarl of a beast; it lashed the channel waters white in its fury. Those aboard the *Aleut* looked into the blackness of night; fear clutched their hearts and their nerves grew tense. And the sea with countless fingers groped about the hull seeking a hold. And then, do you recall . . .

But, no! You can't recall that because you did not see it and no man lived to tell the story of what happened after the steamers left. Only I, Neptune, saw; only the silent diver who read the story while below knows what happened.

The storm grew in fury; the waves in their might lifted the hull slightly from the rock, then lowered it again. With the scream of buckling plates the fangs of the reef bit deep into the vessel and those aboard fought back madness and looked to the officers for protection.

The officers, heavily armed, moved among them, giving assurance that all was well and a rescuing steamer would soon be alongside. Eager eyes stared into the night and saw only blackness. The fear grew; despair and hope fought the battle in each heart and when hope for the moment triumphed the red and green running lights of phantom ships gleamed—and vanished.

The scream of the storm grew louder.

From the depths of the ship rushed swarthy men with the fear of madness gleaming in their eyes. The first officer drew his automatic pistol and ordered them back. They paused, in doubt, each waiting for some one to lead. One or more must die before they could pass.

Their aspect was fearsome, with their staring black eyes and the grime and grease of the engine room on their swarthy features. They retreated below, not in defeat, but to confer and form a definite plan. In the rigging above the gale played a dirge; in the hull beneath the reef fangs ate deeper.

The first officer reported to the captain.

"Yellow scum! We may have trouble!"

"Shoot to kill!" the captain answered.

Somewhere a woman screamed. The captain's head jerked around.

"Silence that woman!"

A quartermaster hastened to obey. The scream of one starts others when human nerves are taut.

A passenger stepped up, his manner respectful.

"Captain, I represent a committee of the passengers. We do not presume to dictate or even suggest. Can not we be set ashore?"

The captain did not look at the raging sea. He knew without looking.

"No small boat can live. Don't worry! The ship is wedged on the rocks, she can't sink. A base of granite is supporting her. A rescuing steamer will be here soon!"

If he had misgivings in his own mind; if he regretted his failure to place his passengers aboard the other steamer, he remained silent. His was the responsibility here—and hereafter.

TO THOSE aboard, the night blackness had contained menace enough, but now, with the sea lashed white—white, not black—seemed the garb of death.

Nerves strained to the breaking point began to snap; the captain turned to the quartermaster.

"What was done with that woman?"

"Confined to the writing room, sir; locked in with others who were showing panic, sir!"

Mutiny!

The swarthy crowd from below decks spilled up a ladder. No uncertainty this time. They wanted a boat and would have it. Some would die, but others would live. The captain spoke tersely:

"They're armed. Shoot to kill!"

The first officer answered—

"Aye aye sir—the scum!"

He was glad they were not white men.

Women screamed. Stewards rushed in to quiet them. Some were bound and thrust into the writing room. The quartermaster had no part in this. A graver condition was developing and the captain was rallying his best men.

The ship shuddered as if unutterably tired. A shift of several feet came slowly. From the depths the hull groaned as frames buckled and plates carried away.

A MAN screamed—

"My God, she's going!"

The decks became alive. The leader of the mutineers rushed at the captain. His face was twisted into a snarl. The captain's face was cold and calm. He leveled his weapon and spoke sharply.

The leader's voice, high pitched and whining, sounded above the storm.

"By God, we're going to take a boat!"

The captain hesitated, then realizing that words would not stop the impending panic, fired. The leader dropped and another took his place. He turned to rally the others and a bullet, through the back of the skull, dropped him. A quartermaster hurled the body into the sea.

The leader of the passengers approached once more, protest on his lips.

"Put him in irons," the captain ordered; then he added, "and any of the others!"

The quartermaster was a powerful man; the passenger had no chance. He was led, protesting, away.

A skulking figure darted along the deck, running low. When his chance came he knocked the captain's weapon down. The first officer felled him with his gun, then heaved him over the side.

The chief engineer joined the captain.

"You can't stop them with guns," he said. "There are too many of them and you had better use—"

The captain turned on him. His stare was as cold as ice. He was about to put the chief in his place, but the man from the engine room spoke a single word—

"Steam!"

That would stop them. The captain nodded, the chief stepped to the pilot house and telephoned. A man unreeled a hose and turned a valve. As the mutineers, now joined by whites from the steerage, surged forward, a jet of water leaped from the nozzle. It changed to hot water, then live steam. They faltered, and several dropped, writhing. A bullet was different, but steam covered them all.

One of the swarthy men disappeared below. He caught up a spanner and knocked down the man standing watch on the steam line. Then he closed the valve.

Backed by steam, the captain was driving the mutineers back. The steam jet died and with a cry of triumph they came—a swarming, seething, maddened mob with flashing knives cutting a pathway through the crowded deck to the boats. They spilled into a boat as water spills from a ledge into a pool. Two of their number stood by and paid out as the writhing falls were swallowed by the screaming blocks. They slid down the falls, missed the boat and vanished in the black water. Then the ship went mad.

From doors and ladders they poured, their cry blending to a mighty demand.

"The boats! The boats!"

And each turned on those nearest and fought until one fell and one went on. And the cries of the doomed grew louder and louder uutil it reached the very heavens; until the sea in the might of its pity rose and claimed its own. With a thousand fingers it caught the hull, lifted it clear and drew it down. Around the momentary hole in the water the sea madly rushed in great circles as if fearful it would be denied its prey.

In the center of the seething eddy a small boat spun dizzily while swarthy men strained at the oars. The struggle was brief, futile—splinters of driftwood defying a tide. Then it vanished and over the spot the storm spread a shroud of foam and from below no living thing emerged, but the tides ebbed and flowed and the gale rushed on.

A Story of the Montana Ranges

By ROBERT CARSE

JOYFUL

THEY rode hunched low in their saddles, the wind strident, stabbing, at their backs. Ahead of them on the frozen ground were the tracks of many cattle—cattle which had passed just before them, but neither man looked up or spoke; they were too numb and weary to speak.

Their horses stumbled and slipped down the side of a small coulee, where the bite of the wind was not so sharp. For a moment they stopped, steam rising in small silver clouds from their horses' flanks.

"North er south?" asked Brenner, the smaller man, who held the lead rope of the pack horse.

"No'th," mumbled the other, his lips stiff with the cold, "they's th' fence, other side o' th' coulee; heah them damn' cows?"

Brenner nodded, pulled his worn sombrero lower about his eyes, jerked wearily at the lead rope. Where the coulee widened out a bit they came upon the rough shack, half dug, half built in the coulee side. As they dismounted, began to unsaddle and take off the pack load, fine hard snow came dancing down the wind. They cursed, hurrying at their tasks.

In the shack Brenner dumped down the small blanket rolls into the two bunks, started a fire in the rusty stove. The big man had gone twice nervously to the door, to stare out to the east, toward the barbed wire fence, where the cattle stood head down, shivering, stamping. At last he hefted up a roll of wire, thrust a pair of pliers into his overall pocket, started out the door. The smaller man looked up from his work at the stove.

"You goin' out among them critters now?" he asked.

"Shore. They'll have that fence down an' be bound fer Oklahoma, I don't—"

"You won't go fer, Hawkins," observed the small man. "Won't do no harm to wait until mornin', when th' hosses is freshened, an' we kin ride in among 'em, drive 'em offen it— Gittin' too dark to see now, anyhow."

Hawkins nodded reluctantly, admitting the other's logic. Outside, darkness had come, leaden, swift; the fine, hard snow pellets had changed to large flakes. When he went outside five minutes later to bring in what little firewood had been stacked against the side of the shack and to bed down the three horses in the sod hogan in back of the shack, there was already a full three inches of snow on the frozen ground.

Brenner scoured out the rusty frying

and TRIUMPHANT

pan and coffee pot, dexterously got supper while Hawkins stacked the wood, brought in a pailful of snow to be melted into drinking and cooking water. They worked for the most part in a lethargic silence; they had ridden thirty some miles that day, with the northwest wind at their backs the whole time.

"WISHT I was back in th' Panhandle," ventured Hawkins, revived somewhat by his supper.

Brenner, sitting by the reddening side of the stove, cigaret paper and sack in his crooked fingers, squinted up.

"Ain't nothin' much in th' Panhandle now," he remarked.

Hawkins stretched out his tall, overall clad frame in the box chair, stared about him at the small, barren shack, listened to the shriek of the wind, the steady rustle of the snow outside. He spat thoughtfully at the cracked board floor and observed—

"Better 'n tendin' fence in a Montana snow gale, anyhow."

Brenner, who had taken a small, black book from the pocket of his mackinaw, gazed up.

"Yaas, but a man's got too much temptation down in them Texas towns; feller can save money up in this country."

"An' freeze his neck off!" appended the big Texan; the sound of the wind, the snow, made him nervous.

He got to his feet, stamped creakingly about the shack in his wet boots. The little structure was one of six along the sixty miles of Bar MX fence, built to house the punchers who during the winter

months were sent out from the main ranch to keep the cattle off the wire, where they might pile up, unless driven off.

Right after fall roundup the Bar MX foreman and his gang had made the circuit of the six shacks, storing them with food, firewood and baled hay for the punchers' horses. Hawkins now made melancholy inventory of the place. Stove, kerosene lantern and oil, two bunks, two rickety chairs made by last winter's occupants out of boxes, three board shelves filled with unappetizing canned goods, about a cord and a half of firewood, three post card views of Buffalo, Wyoming, nailed to the wall by some homesick cowpoke during a preceding winter.

Hawkins swore gently in border Spanish, reviling the hectic day and night in which he had spent his spring and summer wages in one wild, wide open celebration after roundup. He turned on the little man, whom he did not particularly like.

"That nickel nursin' foreman must think we got th' appetite o' a coupla canaries! Ain't enough chuck there to make a c'yote fat."

Brenner looked nearsightedly up from his book, his long, gentle face full in the yellow light of the kerosene lantern.

"Who—Ben Brailey? Ain't him; it's th' missus that says what we eat an' don't eat."

"You should know!" snapped Hawkins bad naturedly.

The little man was not a regular cow hand; he had spent most of his time about the ranch-house proper, chopping wood, helping the China boy cook, tending the chickens, the milk cows—farm hand's chores. Hawkins, who was a born and bred puncher, scorned him because of it, slightly resented the fact that he had been paired off with this man by the foreman.

He got nervously to his feet again, creaking aimlessly about the shack, profanely criticizing all niggardly ranch owners who spent the winter months in California and left the management of their ranchos to penny pinching foremen.

At last, underneath the bottom bunk, he found a tattered but still voluminous mail order house catalog and a deck of well thumbed cards. He sat down with the catalog on his knees; he was happy until the other arose, started taking off his sombrero and boots, preparing to turn in.

Hawkins, who had read through *Farm Implements, Men's and Children's Clothing,* to *Ladies' Winter Underwear,* and had stayed spellbound, rose and put away the catalog philosophically. He was too old a cow hand not to know that there would be many long, dreary evenings in which he could pursue his education further.

Before wrapping in his own blankets, he went to the door, opened it a crack. The bluish darkness was silvered with snow, the air was heavy with it; for the second or so that he stood there it flustered against his face, his eyes, laid a powdery little track through the partially opened door. The Texan shuddered.

"COME an' get it!" crowed Brenner professionally.

Hawkins started up sleepily.

"Still snowin'?"

"Still snowin'—worse 'n ever."

Hawkins swore, yanked on his boots, his mackinaw, washed face and hands perfunctorily in the bucket of melted snow.

"Hosses fed?" he asked, sitting down on one of the box-chairs, the hot pannikin balanced on his knee.

"No," admitted the little man, still bent over the stove. "She's drifted purty deep out there; I ain't a big enough man to get through."

"It's a wonder," said Hawkins scornfully, putting the hot breakfast from him and getting to his feet, "that that Chinee cook didn't grab you fer th' clapper on his alarm clock!"

He glared at the other man, jammed on his sombrero and mittens and went out the door, waist high into the drifts. He came back, cursing, found a long board under one of the bunks, went back at the

drifts, using it as a shovel. It was hard, cold work; it was still blowing shrilly, the wind whipping a sharp fine spray of snow dust that stung his eyes and face. Hawkins was a powerful man, a hard worker when once at it; he plowed mightily through the drifts, freed the door of the dugout where the three horses were. He tore open a fresh bale of the coarse hay, fed, watered them, went glumly back to his breakfast.

Afterward he rolled a cigaret, lighted it, rose to his feet. He pulled out his flannel shirt tail, ripped a strip from it with his knife, then bound the strip about his head and ears, knotting the end under his chin. Mackinaw buttoned high, sombrero and mittens on, he turned to the other man.

"Come on, you!"

Brenner nodded and followed. First they tried the drifts in the bed of the coulee, and sank through knee deep. Hawkins shook his head; no horse could get through that. He gestured silently and Brenner followed him back into the shack.

Hands outstretched over the stove, Hawkins outlined his plan:

"Ain't no use to put th' hulls on th' hosses, try to git 'em out in this. I got me my Winchester in th' hogan. We go out an' fire a coupla shots, start a coupla them steers upwind—t'others an' th' cows an' young 'uns 'll foller. Bring that there blanket to wave at 'em."

THEY floundered out through the drifts to the fence, where the lowing, snorting cattle had churned about in a wide semicircle. Hawkins fired the Winchester, yipped and howled, the smaller man joining with him and waving the blanket sturdily. The big, icy shouldered steers looked dully up and kept on with their slow, painful rotation. Hawkins even made so bold as to wade in, hammer and kick, prod with the rifle butt and barrel at one of the big longhorns. The steer snorted and side stepped, and kept on around the circle.

The two men stood back at last, staring perplexedly. Both had enough knowledge of stock to know now that, unless the wind changed to due east, the cattle would not swing from the fence and move away into the open, across to the sheltered cañons and coulées where there was protection and winter forage. There was small chance of the wind's changing for days, for weeks; already some of the weaker calves and mavericks had fallen down in the center of that stumbling ring of steers, not to rise again.

"Come on!" shouted Hawkins in the wind. "Ain't no good of us stayin' heah. Nothin' we kin do until a crust forms that'll bear 'em up."

They plowed back to the shack, contented themselves with shoveling the snow off the roof, securing the shaky stovepipe with baling wire, clearing a path to the hogan.

"Wonder how them fellers is makin' out down th' line?" asked Brenner as they sat over their noonday meal.

"Same as us," grunted Hawkins, munching. "Same all up an' down th' line—th' hull valley. How far to that No. 2 shack?"

"Ten mile—they say."

"Well! If they was any goin' at all, we'd 'a' seen one o' them. Come up to see how we was makin' out, anyhow. This wind keeps up, she'll put a crust on it a man can stand up on, then I'll make me a little *pasear* down th' line; leave you to keep house."

Brenner blinked at the insult, said nothing, soon retired to his corner and pulled out his small black book, to read assiduously. Hawkins, having slept and eaten well, had a large fund of physical energy which he had not yet expended, which made him feel pent up and jumpy. He circled the shack, back and forth, staring time and again at the three views of Buffalo, Wyoming, patched a hole in his mackinaw coat, cleaned his rifle, rolled innumerable cigarets.

At last darkness came and he went out thankfully with bucket and lantern to water, feed and bed down the horses. When he came back Brenner was busy

in the dim light at the stove getting supper; since they had arrived Hawkins had not lifted a hand to get or prepare a meal. If, he told himself sullenly, Jim Brailey, the foreman, chose to send him out paired with this old woman, he would perform nothing but his regular cow hand's duties; let this other little half pint scour, cook and brush.

Brenner, for his part, was more or less content; he had not actually ridden range for some ten years; he was accustomed to cooking and scrubbing—"wimmen's er Chinks' chores."

After supper Brenner settled down in his customary corner, his black book open before him, weak, astigmatized eyes straining at the fine print. Hawkins watched him glumly for awhile, rose, found the mail order catalog, proceeded on from *Women's Underwear* through *House Furnishings* to *Kitchen Utensils* and there called it a night.

He got up, stretched, opened the door a bit, peered out, to swear long and loud.

"What's th' matter?" asked Brenner, looking up.

"Snowin' agin! *Hombre* must be some relation to Santy Claus to like this country in th' winter!"

"Uh-huh."

Brenner softly shut his book, prepared to turn in, the other man following him.

IN THE morning Hawkins with difficulty pried open the door, sweated all forenoon at digging out his former path to the hogan. Just before midday he managed to get through the drifts to the fence. The cattle were gone—to the eastward, with the wind, the snow sweeping behind them once more. During the night they had either stamped down the taut wire and pounded through the gap, or some of the fence poles had cracked and fallen under the weight of the drifts.

Hawkins made his way back to the shack, got Brenner, a roll of wire, the ax and pliers. Together, they managed temporarily to repair the fence, in the event that any more of the Bar MX cattle drifted down from the valley end, two miles to the north, or from the sheltered coulees to the south, where the other men were stationed in their shacks along the sixty miles of wire.

It was snowing again when they turned back and with difficulty they found the coulée and the shack. They were tired out by their terrific work, and dozed during the afternoon by the hot stove, hats cocked over their eyes. At nightfall Brenner started up to get supper and Hawkins went out to care for the horses.

When supper was done Hawkins looked critically up at the lines of canned goods on the shelves behind the stove.

"How much longer you figger that chuck is good fer?" he inquired, conscientiously assuming the rôle of layman.

" 'Bout two-three weeks. Ben Brailey ain't got much idee about a cowpoke's appetite; you was right about that."

"Shore I was right!" snorted the Texan, and picked up his mail order catalog.

The thing soon tired him tonight, and he flung it from him.

"WHAT you readin'?" he asked Brenner, who sat as usual in his corner.

Brenner looked reluctantly up from his page.

"Book I bought me in Larson, after roundup."

Hawkins smiled.

"When you was drunk?"

Brenner's weak lips came together.

"After I was drunk—"

"What kinda book is it?"

Brenner did not answer; he closed the book, putting both his work worn hands protectingly over the cover.

"What kinda book is it?" persisted the bigger man.

"Bible—"

"Bible!" Hawkins snorted through his heavy nose, and laughed.

"How long you been readin' Bibles? You was so drunk in Larson it run out yer ears!"

"Yaas, I was," admitted Brenner carefully. "I—I ain't goin' to no more, though."

Hawkins guffawed loudly.

"If you ain't th' first cowpoke to say that!"

Brenner's long, thin face flushed a bit.

"I know I ain't th' first," he muttered, "but, I meant it then, an' I mean it now."

"What you mean—'then'?"

"In Larson, there—"

"In Larson!"

Hawkins stared wonderingly for awhile at the other man and at last laughed deeply.

"Oh, you was over to th' tent meetin' outside o' town!"

The little man nodded wordlessly. Hawkins, recalling the other man's drunkenness in the little cow town, roared heartily at the humor of the situation.

"You was took in by that sky pilot, too?" he demanded, greatly enjoying his role of inquisitor.

"I was converted; yaas," corrected the little man.

Hawkins let loose a fresh howl of laughter.

"Ole Hem-Haw Stoner converted you, huh?"

"Yaas—" reluctantly—"that's right."

"Well, I'll be damned!" Hawkins swore mirthfully, his broad face radiant with amusement. "You know that old Hem-Haw was sellin' Injun medicine down in th' Panhandle, an' they run him out hell fer high water?"

"Yaas. I heard them tell as much. But all that was afore he got th' Word, though—"

Hawkins' was not a subtle mind; he contented himself with two or three more slurs on the tent revivalist's sincerity and religion for drunken cowpunchers, then was satisfied with his wit, picked up the old pack of cards, set forth a game of solitaire.

Brenner, in his earlier days, had been as great a gambler as a drinker; he closed his book now and watched with critical eyes. He edged a little bit nearer in his chair, so that he might see better. He put the Bible on the floor.

"Look," he said once, poking forth a bent forefinger, "put that trey on yer red four; then you can run out yer spade four an' five . . ."

"Sharp eyed ole c'yote, ain't you!" commented Hawkins, and made the move.

He finished the game shortly, shuffled the pack, started dealing out five cards at a time, face up. Poker hands. From these, he discarded, drew two, caught four aces in one hand, a low heart flush in another. Brenner licked his lips, pale eyes shining.

"Cards is runnin' hot an' high, ain't they?" commented Hawkins, looking up.

"Yaas, I wouldn't 'a' discarded that pair o' deuces; keep 'em an' draw three, I'd say."

"Well!" Hawkins poked his sombrero farther back on his forehead with a broad thumb. "How 'bout a little two hand? Pass th' time, good fer th' mind, th' morals— Huh?"

Brenner lowered his eyes, shaking his head, staring at his closed Bible.

"Naw," he said at last, "I swore in my pledge I wouldn't."

"Hell!" scoffed Hawkins. "You feel that way about it—we just play fer fun; I ain't got no money anyhow, after that ring tailed jam aroun' us all threw in Larson after roundup."

Brenner's fingers laced, relaxed, came together.

"We don't play fer no money—no stakes?"

Hawkins nodded, shuffling the pack anticipatively.

"No money, no stakes. Set down theah; we'll use that chair fer table."

THEY played a hand or so, then Hawkins got up, went to the shelves, came back, his hands full of matches; he dropped them down in two equal piles, explaining—

"We gotta have some kinda tokens!"

They played steadily, cunningly, finding in the subtleties of the game a great release from their boredom. Brenner won slowly, but consecutively. Hawkins got up, replenished his supply of matches from the box, lost that supply almost completely.

"Lissen," he said at last, "ain't much in this fer me; I allus start playin' careful, then branch out wild when I ain't playin' fer anythin', when there ain't anythin' to sober me down. How about we play fer—fer our hulls an' bridles?"

"I don't own none," stated Brenner, trying to make oblique negation to the suggestion of real gambling.

Hawkins frowned in understanding; he himself was a real wandering cowhand, owned his own riding horse and, like most Texan punchers, a beautifully tooled and silver embossed Mexican saddle. Both of these he now had with him; had used them as something of an affectation, partially explaining the fact to the jeering punchers in the bunkhouse by showing that he would not do much actual riding or range work with saddle or horse while stationed along the fence, but "leap aroun' over them drifts like a jackrabbit".

But this other man was much more of a farmhand than a cowpoke, was using a cheap, ranch owned saddle and slow, old mare from the Bar MX string. He had, then, nothing to gamble with but his credit. What he had said was so.

"Your credit's good with me," stated Hawkins, eager to jerk this other man down from his shaking pedestal of sanctity. "My hull an' hoss is worth about two-fifty, together. I'll bank. Broke matches is a quarter, whole ones four bits; your credit against my gear; settle pay day; or—" there was a little scorn in his voice again now—"you win everythin', you can ride 'em back."

Brenner wet his lips, looked at the sweaty palms of his hands, envisioning Hawkins' fine riding horse, the silver studded Mexican saddle.

"All right," he mumbled finally, caught up in the old, hot, irresistible urge to gamble—win or lose; pledge or no pledge. "Settle pay day . . ."

Hawkins nodded, spread out the cards.

"Draw fer deal."

Brenner drew, won, dealt. Hawkins smiled happily at his hand. Funny how some of these Montana and Wyoming *hombres* could get taken in by a windjammer like old Doc Stoner, then two weeks later forget it all.

"Open?" he asked.

"Yaas," cautiously, "kin—"

Hawkins scowled; he hadn't expected that, somehow.

They played until the first red flaming of the sun, and later. At first, Hawkins won, then lost, won again, and lost—steadily. They stopped once while Hawkins got fresh tobacco and papers from his bunk and the little man put a pot of coffee on the stove. When they sat down to their cards again, Hawkins counted his remaining matches.

"You're a hundred an' ten dollars in me," he announced with a certain sullen grimness.

"Yaas, so I reckon. My deal?"

"*Sí, señor.*"

HAWKINS read the cards as they came to him: king, five, five, king, seven of clubs. He studied the other man's impassive face for a moment, tossed a small handful of matches to the center of the table.

"Open fer five dollars."

"Wowee! Jest a minnit!"

Brenner conned his hand thoughtfully for fully a minute.

"All right. Cards?"

"One fer me."

Brenner's crooked fingers flicked the card across to him. Slowly, the Texan picked it up, his eyes widening as he looked at it; he had drawn the king of clubs as his fifth card!

"How many you takin'?" he asked, looking up.

"Ain't takin' none."

"Huh!"

Hawkins was silent for awhile, studying his hand, conjecturing about the other's. The little man had seemed a bit dubious about coming into the hand, about meeting the five dollar opener. Now he said he stood pat.

"So y'ain't takin' none?" vaguely said Hawkins, stalling for time to think upon the variety of possibilities in Brenner's hand.

Brenner shook his head, then looked up from his cards and said—

"Well, what do you say?"

Hawkins regarded his exasperating little antagonist for fully a minute; then he surveyed his hand. Suddenly he reached for his small stack of matches.

"Ten dollars!" announced Hawkins, and tossed in the matches.

"Well!"

Brenner looked long and hard at his hand; Finally—

"Yer ten—an' a dollar better."

"Your dollar an' twenty better!"

"My sakes! Well—that, an' five more!"

"That five an' twenty better!"

"Yer twenty an' ten more. Gettin' kinda steep, ain't we?"

Hawkins' heavy lips came together; his blunt fingers unconsciously mashed the cigaret held between them. He was down to his last few matches. It looked now as if he had crawled in the wrong end of the hole. Better call . . .

"Call," he said sullenly, still rather confident, but angered that he could not go on betting.

He pushed in his last chips.

Card by card Brenner put them down. Deuce of clubs, deuce of hearts, deuce of spades, deuce of diamonds, ace of diamonds. Hawkins' yellow teeth grated as he brought them together.

"Four deuces," announced the little man softly, almost regretfully. "I kep' that ace along fer comp'ny!"

Hawkins, for quite a time, was speechless. In the end he rose to his feet, murmuring with faint good humor—

"You foxed me out 'n' out, you did!"

"Four deuces is kinda measly fer all that money," said Brenner, attempting mitigation for his clean sweep.

Hawkins did not make reply; he swung open the door, stepped out into the fulvous dawn.

WHEN Hawkins came back, bearing the heavy Mexican saddle, stirrups and bridle that were no longer his, the little man was kneeling by his bunk. Mouth slack in amazement, Hawkins softly closed the door, stood there, the saddle still against his hip. The other man's lips were working silently, his hands were clasped together over the small black Bible. He was praying!

At last, when the little man stood up, his thin face was wet with quick tears.

"Hawkins," he gulped breathily, trying to control himself, "keep yer gear. I been tempted from th' path into sin. All o' a sudden, when you was gone, it come to me—what I done. I—jest prayed fer strength—an' it come to me. Keep yer trappin's; I give 'em back in full!"

Hawkins let fall the heavy saddle to the floor with a slam. He set his hands on his hips and cursed, called the other and himself a variety of filthy names in two languages; his pride, as a man, as a puncher, was deeply prodded now. To gamble away a whole night, lose all you owned in the world, to accept your loss with the philosophy gained in years of vicissitude, then have your payment literally flung back in your face!

He yanked up the saddle and bridle, dumped them down in the other man's bunk, shook his great fist under the other's nose, warning him that he would break his back if he said one crazy word more about refusing anything in payment of a just and honestly made debt. Brenner was speechless, overcome by his conflicting emotions, the poignancy of the moment in which he had realized his waywardness. He did nothing but push the saddle and bridle from his bunk to the floor and leave them there; let this big Texan howl and rage all he wanted to, he, Brenner, had just experienced the mental pangs of hell's fire, was not going to pass through it again . . .

HAWKINS partially grasped the other's attitude of refusal; during the rest of the week that they stayed in the shack he tried in devious and violent ways to make the other man admit that he was the possessor of the valuable gear. Brenner as steadfastly refused. He had had his hour of suffering, wished no more.

They had been snowbound in the shack for almost three weeks, were down to two cans of beans, a can of salmon, some dry, brittle bread, a half pound of coffee and some rancid bacon. Never, during that time, had they seen any other man, not even a stray steer since the day the herd had smashed through the fence and gone on.

Both men were rather stoical, unimaginative, but now they began acutely to realize that their position was at best an untenable, if not a slightly dangerous, one. It was over thirty miles of broken country back to the main Bar MX ranch-house.

A short two miles to the north rose the black, bleak hills, where no man, no living thing, existed. To the south, sweeping away to the other range of small mountains, was the broad valley, all owned or under the control of the Bar MX. Across that sixty miles of valley were scattered the other five fence shacks, facing, as this one did, the Bar MX fence.

In those shacks must be the other pairs of punchers, sent out, as they themselves had been, three weeks before to tend fence.

There was, then, just one thing to do—head south along the fence, consolidate with the other punchers and start back in a body to the main ranch-house. The nearest other refuge was the Rattling W, whose land lay on the other side of the wire, the ranch-house a good twenty-two miles across the bleak valley flats.

In words of one syllable the two men talked it over, shortly agreed that there was nothing to it but to take their last few rations of grub and the horses, plow south toward the other shacks. To attempt, alone, to cross that thirty some miles of wind swept valley and cañon back to the ranch-house was nothing but suicidal.

Hawkins scrambled up the coulée side, tried the snow crust out in the open, found that it would bear his weight, was almost ice hard. Working a full day and a half, they cleared a path up the side of the coulée bank for the horses.

JUST at dawn, after twenty-two days of occupancy, they prepared to desert the shack, leaving nailed to the wall an illiterately scribbled note to Brailey, the foreman, telling him of their action, in the advent that he and his gang might make it through from the ranch with supplies. Brenner killed the fire, laid a fresh one for the next comers, while Hawkins led out the horses, put the small pack on the lead horse, the cheap stock saddle on Brenner's knock kneed Bar MX mare. The other horse, which he still persisted in saying belonged to the little man, he left unsaddled. He hobbled the three horses, came back into the shack.

The big, silver studded saddle, the stirrups and bridle still lay on the floor between the bunks, where Brenner had pushed them the morning after their game. Hawkins frowned in anger, gestured toward the gear.

"Pick up your gear an' come on!" he growled.

"Ain't mine," said the little man, face down as he stuffed his overall legs more tightly into his boot tops.

"*Por dios*, it ain't mine!"

Hawkins picked up the Winchester rifle, took his warmed mittens from the stovepipe, went out and mounted the Bar MX horse. Brenner shut the shack door, came trotting after. For a moment he stared perplexedly up at the big, bare flanked horse with its Texas brand. Then, quickly, he loosened the pack ropes on the lead horse, jerked out his blanket roll, made a saddle cloth out of the two thin blankets, mounted the Texas horse clumsily.

Hawkins' anger was sudden, fierce. He reached over, knocked the other man sprawling from the horse into the snow. Brenner lay still, hands over his face, a trickle of blood from his cut eye darkening the snow under his head. Hawkins, breathing fitfully, noisily, through his nose, stared down at him, greatly tempted to kick the other into insensibility. The futility of it finally impressed him and he went back into the shack, got the saddle and bridle, saddled the big horse,

mounted it, went on ahead silently up to the coulée brink.

Brenner rose, wiped the clotted blood from his cut eye, groaned up into the saddle of the Bar MX horse, picked up the lead rope of the pack horse and followed. Hawkins, hearing the crunch of the horses' hoofs in the snow, started abruptly south, the other man a short distance behind him.

For two or three miles they were able to ride. Then the horses' hoofs began to break through the snow crust; their hocks bled; they stumbled, whinnied, fell. Wordlessly, the two men tore strips from their blankets, made hoof pads for the horses. They jerked them up, calling, cajoling, and led them forward, skidding and falling clumsily. Brenner's old Bar MX mare was the first one to fall and refuse to rise. The little cavalcade stopped; the two men looked at each other, at the sky. The wind was droning, murmuring again, rising to a fierce shrillness. Gray, sullen clouds lay low on the black hills to the north. Soon, they knew, it would snow again.

Hawkins shook his head regretfully, cocked the Winchester. Brenner turned his head aside; he remembered the old mare's first foal. The report was flat, short, whipped away in the wind. The other two horses rolled their eyes and started ahead, the men plodding beside them.

A mile farther on, in the first eery whiteness of the falling snow, they were forced to shoot the other two horses.

"Montana!" growled Hawkins, turning blindly away, cursing the place as he would a man who had just hit him from behind.

They swung hastily to their left, afraid of becoming lost, stumbled along until they found the fence, turned right, kept close to it. Snow was caked under their high boot heels. Time and again they stopped to claw it off. In ten paces it packed hard and heavy again. Hawkins sat down at last, pulled off his boots, knocked away the heels with the rifle butt. Brenner took the gun, did the same for himself. They went on, inexpressibly weary already, both oppressed by the death of the horses.

They stopped to rest for a moment, leaning on the top strand of wire.

"How far—you think—we come?" gasped Brenner.

"'Bout four mile. No more. This heah soft snow shore is hell."

THEY went on. Brenner was swaying, staggering now; he did not possess the youth, the stamina and strength of the other man. Once he slipped in his heelless boots, went sprawling into the smothering blanket of the snow. He got up painfully, tottered after the other man, who had slowed his pace for him.

Soon after, Hawkins, who strode powerfully ahead, looked back; Brenner was shouting something as he walked along. The big puncher waited, straining his ears. Then, fragmentarily, the words came to him through the slow rustle of the snow:

> "Rock of Ages . . . for me;
> . . . hide my-self-f . . . in Thee—
> Let the water and the Blood—
> Save fr'm wrath an' make me pure."

"Loco! barked Hawkins, going on. "Loco 's hell!"

Still the words, the majestic old tune, pursued him. It was finished; another took its place, another. Hawkins shrugged, marveling at the little man's knowledge of Doc Stoner's store, overheard many a night through the tent walls while he and other bibulous minded punchers had stood at a nearby bar.

Brenner, behind, walked in a sort of mystic exaltation, losing all his fear, his pain, weariness in the thought that at last he had purged himself, could go straightforwardly to whatever should lie ahead. From the depth of his fevered brain he recalled all the old camp meeting hymns he had heard as a boy in Missouri, all he had relearned in that strange, brain misted night when he had staggered up the aisle between the benches to

the platform where the white haired preacher waited for him, to shake his hand and swear him to the pledge.

He did not walk as he sang; it was a kind of stumbling march, his weak, treacherous legs keeping ragged time to the beat of the hymns he crowed.

He stumbled finally into the figure of Hawkins, was shaken somewhat from his feverish exaltation.

"What'sa matter?" he croaked, pawing the snow from his face with a wet mitten.

Hawkins grunted, poked one hand ahead into the swirling snow shadows. Brenner peered in the direction of the pointing thumb; his mouth sagged open. The fence was down, lost to sight under the snow! Their one infallible guide was gone, gone!

"What we gonna do?" he mumbled.

"Go on," muttered the other. "Fence runs no'th 'n' south; we been goin' south, with th' wind at our backs. Jest keep on that way an' we cain't miss it. Mebbe th' fence is jest down in this one place."

"Mebbe. But the wind's stopped."

Slowly, Hawkins turned himself about in all four directions; what the other had said was so. The wind had stopped; only the treacherous, sibilant snow drifted down at them from a dozen different directions.

"Well," said Hawkins stolidly," I ain't goin' back; couldn't find our tracks now nohow. Cain't stay heah; a *hombre* 'ud go to sleep. Go on—tha's all."

He started ahead. The other did not follow. Hawkins dragged on a few paces, stopped, looked back. Brenner was kneeling in the snow. Slightly alarmed, Hawkins went back to him. Brenner was praying, mumbling the words in a swift monotone, hands upraised. Hawkins shook the snow from his sodden sombrero brim and cursed. He jerked the other by the shoulder, kicked him steadily until he stood up.

"Last time I fool with you, you loco galoot!" he raged. "Save your prayin' until you're safe, fed, warm— Come on!"

He heaved at the other's arm.

"No!"

The little man stiffened, set his feet, pulled loose.

"I gotta make my peace with my God!"

For a while, unbelievingly, Hawkins stared at him. Then he shifted the rifle to his other hand and shook his head; they were in a very tight place now, had a very good chance of starving, freezing to death before they were found, or found one of the shacks. It was every man for himself now; he had done all in his power for this other madman, could not, would not, do any more. He lowered his head, tramped on. Behind him, Brenner knelt again in the snow and prayed.

HAWKINS walked for about five hundred yards, slowed his pace gradually, stopped. Back there that crazy fool had probably finished his praying now, had sunk down sleepily in the snow. To freeze—die. Hawkins swore, turned around.

He found Brenner curled up in the snow, head in his arms. Hawkins tugged him to his feet; the little man was in a coma of exhaustion, physically spent, careless now of what happened except that he slept. Hawkins talked to him, swore at him, pounded, kicked, pinched him. Brenner reeled, fell stupidly back into the white cavity his body had made in the snow.

"Well," admitted Hawkins aloud, "it shore is time fer prayin' now!"

He lifted the Winchester, fired the remaining three shots slowly, a desperate signal to any one who might hear. Then he hoisted the other's slight frame to his broad shoulders, kicked aside the useless rifle and went on.

He reeled, staggered in a drift, came toppling down, Brenner bumping limply down beside him. The shock seemed to revive the smaller man somehow. His eyes opened, his frost bitten face muscles twitched. He opened his mouth, sang, as Hawkins got grimly up, lifted him to his shoulders again.

This time it was "Onward Christian Soldiers," a garbled, fever inspired compendium of a dozen hymns by the time

they had gone a quarter mile. The tune they kept practically intact; to it they applied all sorts of words culled from the dark corners of their brains, heedless as long as they sang, as long as the stirring swing of it kept them awake, away from the soft, beckoning warmth of sleep, of death.

"Oh, come all ye Christian soldiers—"

"Joyful an' triumphant!" bawled Hawkins, drunken with weariness, slipping sidewise, to fall, the other beside him, and realize that he could not get up again, could not again lift the other to his shoulders.

He managed to get to his hands and knees, pull off one mitten, fasten his half frozen hand in the torn collar of Brenner's mackinaw, start forward, dragging him. The effort was stupendous, took from him the last of his immense strength. He slid to his face, rose halfway; for, ahead, he imagined that he saw the lemon colored flicker of a light. Men, he knew, when they were as he was, saw things like that.

Bowed beneath vast, unseen weights, he attained his feet, stood wavering there, inhaled gulpingly, bawled out—

"Oh, come— Joyful an' triumphant!"

Gray, frightful weariness eclipsed his brain, his muscles, then, and he went forward flatly on his face in the smothering snow. Voices called excitedly, men ran stumbling through the drifts, holding their lanterns low, yelling:

"You, Hawkins! You, Brenner!"

IT WAS big Ben Brailey, the foreman, wearing the snowshoes which had brought him from the ranch-house, who found them. He cried out, waving his lantern, and the other punchers flapped clumsily over the drifts toward him on their snowshoes, to help pick up the two forms, carry them toward the No. 2 shack.

"Gimme a drink!" demanded Hawkins, sitting weakly up in his bunk the next morning.

A grinning puncher brought him four fingers of brownish liquid in a tin cup. Hawkins drank, spread back his shoulders, shook his head approvingly.

"How's that partner o' mine?"

"Purty sick *hombre.* Brailey's aroun' nursin' him now. We jest built a new shanty out by th' hoss shack until we kin get you-all back. Brenner'll be all right, though; Brailey's got him full to th' ears with medicine."

Hawkins, sitting back, nodded.

"How you get heah—fly?"

The other grinned.

"Purty near. Snowshoes. Had to wade into Larson an' buy 'em. Believe me, too, they was hard to get; ain't had a snow like this in twent' some years."

"Gimme cigaret."

The other rolled it for him, lighted it.

"How'd you guys find us?"

"Started out fer No. 1 shack to get you, an' almost got lost ourselves. Then we heard you singin'—an' swung over gentle like an' found you."

"Singin'?"

"Yeah—singin'. Hymns, like—"

The big man nodded musingly.

"Say," asked the other puncher curiously, "what was that 'Joyful an' Triumphant' stuff you was shoutin' when Brailey found you?"

Hawkins pondered for a moment, smiled slowly.

"Joyful an' Triumphant! You don't know that, huh? Well, learn now: I'm 'Joyful,' an' Brenner, that partner o' mine, he's 'Triumphant'—"

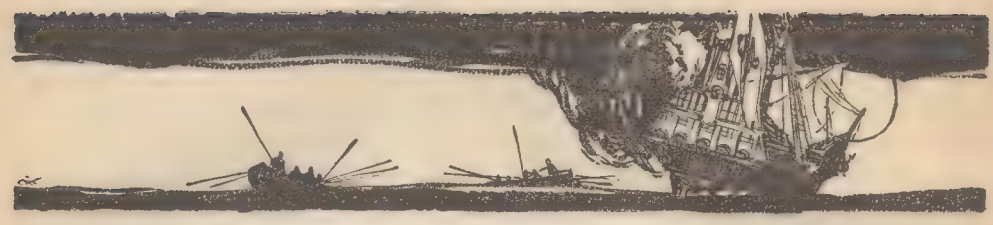
The other man laid a restraining hand on Hawkins' arm.

"Hey," he asked nervously, "you sure you wouldn't feel better if you laid back a bit?"

"Naw—naw! You jest paddle aroun' to that other shack for me an' ask that partner o' mine fer a borry o' his black book—his Bible. Tell him its fer me."

"Bible! You shore you ain't kinda hot 'n' feverish yet, cowboy?"

"Feverish, yer Finnish uncle! I jest got me religion!"



BALLAD OF SAN FRANCISCO

By

JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

HULL down, hull down from Frisco town,
The *Golden Hind* rides free,
And at her rail stands Francis Drake
With buckles at his knee.

There isn't any Frisco town
But Frankie doesn't care.
Twelve chests hold gold and emeralds
And that's the captain's share.

The Spaniards rob the Incas
And Drake has plundered Spain,
The mule-trains on the Isthmus
And ships upon the main.

The Dons they buzz like hornets
Clear up to Mexico;
But Frankie's left the Golden Gate
And Spanish ships are slow.

He's off for Devon and the court
Of England's good Queen Bess
With silver for her coffers
And ribbons for her dress.

Hull down, hull down from Frisco town,
The *Golden Hind* runs free.
And on her poop Sir Francis Drake
Stands looking at the sea.

II

Fresh eggs in San Francisco
Are worth their weight in gold,
And ships that bring in mining men
Have whisky in the hold.

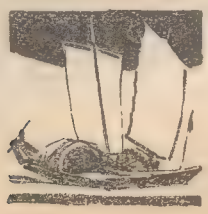
O, the town of San Francisco
Is full of guns and knives;
And lots of men have gold-mines
But few of them have wives.

The ships for San Francisco
Bring clerks and bearded miners—
Old men and boys, they round the Horn
And all are forty-niners.

"We will walk in San Francisco
Where the ships lie yard and yard;
Where there's gold upon the shovels
And the turning of a card."

Their eyes are full of gold-dust
As they weather round Cape Stiff
Where the white Antarctic blizzards
Freeze the breakers to the cliff.

Hull down, hull down from Frisco town,
The ships bear such as these.
They're off to California
With their wash-bowls on their knees.



III

They load them up at Hongkong
With wicker chests of tea;
The clipper ships with Yankee crews
To roar across the sea.

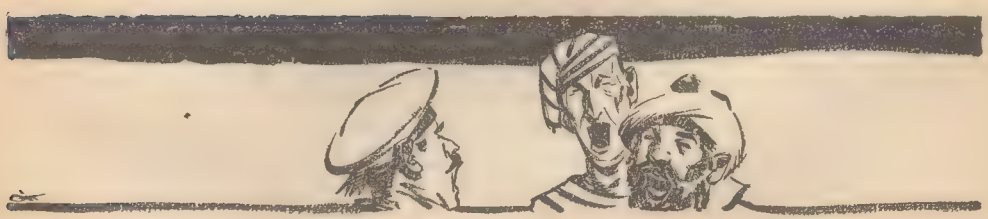
The Yellow Sea, the China Sea
Have pirates and typhoon,
But they couldn't catch a clipper
With her tops'ls in the moon.

The palms of Honolulu
Have seen them going by,
With their prows that split the water
And their masts that rake the sky.

The gallant ships with knifing crews
As hard as you could see—
The kind the crawling crimps pick up
On the Coast of Barbary.

The driving Yankee clippers
With their mastheads in the stars,
And masters that have locked the sails
With padlocks to the spars.

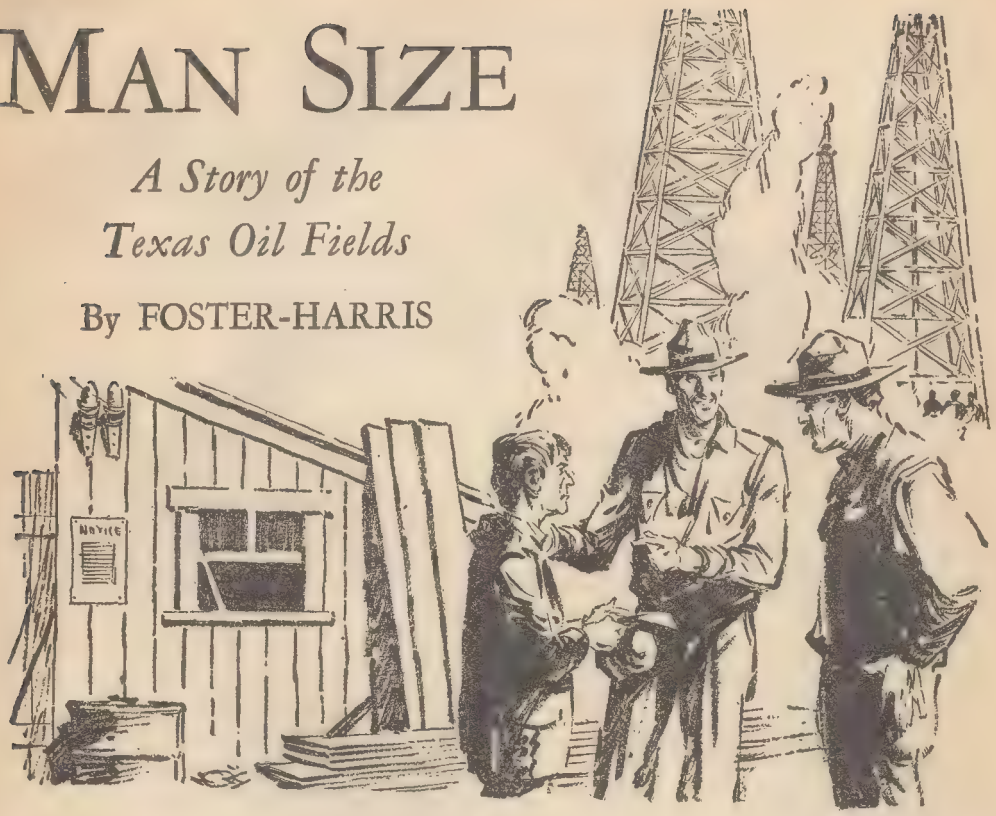
Hull down, hull down from Frisco town,
The clipper ships run free;
From Shanghai to the Golden Gate
Across the Eastern Sea.



MAN SIZE

A Story of the Texas Oil Fields

By FOSTER-HARRIS



THE END came quickly with a smashing, trip-hammer blow, low and to the belt, followed by one to the heart. Henderson wilted on his feet. Down he went in a limp, unconscious heap.

The old saw that a good big man always beats a good little one had been demonstrated anew.

Raging, the big, line gang husky leaped back, crouched, then swung a hobnailed boot to stamp the upturned face.

There was a savage roar from behind the crowd, and the onlookers in front went spinning right and left before the plunging rush of a newcomer. In he came, a huge, khaki garbed tooldresser*, leaping to kick out a heavy clad heel that met the other's ankle in mid-swing with a sickening crunch.

Bellowing with pain, the pipeliner turned madly on this new opponent.

"What the hell!" he roared. "You lousy skunk, what's the idea?"

"Why don't you pick somebody your size?" inquired the newcomer hotly. "Stomp a man when he's down— A-ah, you would, would you!" The line man had come forward with a rush, and they crashed together in a tornado of blows.

Toe to toe, slugging, two-fisted, in a wild welter of blood, sweat and smashing blows, they stood. Science forgotten, without any rules of fair play, it was stark, primeval battle.

They clinched; the newcomer tore himself loose with a pulverizing jolt to his opponent's ribs, beat a terrible tattoo on the pipeline man's stomach; then, stepping back, he flung his great fists in a thundering, irresistible barrage that pounded the other's face into gory pulp.

In a roaring rush he closed again, smothering his man in a hail of jabs and hooks. Then, with a surging, smoking smash, straight up to the jaw, he mea-

*The workman on drilling oil wells whose specific duty it is to sharpen and dress bits. A driller and a tooldresser make up a drilling crew.

sured his man, sending him crashing to the floor.

"Any more?" he screamed, mad with battle. "Any more?"

Like a bullet a bottle zipped past his ear, went driving through a window in a shrieking splintering of glass. Yelling, the crowd closed in like a pack of wolves.

The tooldresser went berserk. An iron legged soda table leaped in his hands as a flailing war club, and in a wild, fighting rage he swept a circle about him, standing astride the fallen Henderson, incarnadined, maddened fury.

A chair hurled from behind caught him full in the back and down he went, his opponents bursting over him in a stamping, plunging, boiling flood of bodies.

"Cheese it! The Rangers!" came a shrill cry.

MAGICALLY the squirming mass exploded into fleeing parts, diving through doors and windows. With a surge the big fighter came to his feet, whirled.

A man with clearly marked, striking features stood in the doorway, leaning casually against the shattered frame. The wide brimmed white Stetson and the two ivory handled revolvers peeping from under his coat marked him for a Texas Ranger. His hands hung loosely at his sides and he puffed slowly on a black cigar.

"What the hell?" he asked calmly. "What's coming off?"

"Pipeliners, they ganged me," admitted the big tooldresser, grinning ruefully.

"Who started it?"

"I did," spoke up the little fellow on the floor suddenly, striving weakly to rise.

The Ranger smiled, a scrutinizing, lazy grin.

"Suicide?" he asked sardonically.

"He called me a gosh darned baby!" cried the little man vehemently. "Nobody can call me that. I soaked him and he beat hell outa me, the big bruiser! Was gonna stomp my face in!"

The Ranger grinned.

"Know 'em?" he asked.

"Naw," denied the tooldresser. "Just a lousy bunch of linemen."

"Wanta prefer any charges?"

"Naw."

The Ranger shrugged.

"Better take your friend over t' drugstore and have him fixed up," he suggested, turning. "Needs it."

The big man reached a hand down to the little man, pulled him carefully to his feet.

"Fella, we sure like to got the holy heck beat outa us," he smiled, a cheerful, battered grin.

"Fella, we sure did," assented the little man, managing an even more sadly battered grimace.

"O'Neil's my name," said the big tooldresser, thrusting out a huge paw. "Oklahoma they calls me, 'cause I'm from Ardmore."

"Henderson's mine," returned the little fellow, grasping the offered hand and waggling it weakly. "Half—Half Pint they call me," shamefacedly, "but by golly it's a half pint they sure has trouble getting down!" defiantly.

"I'll say so!" replied O'Neil, with admiration. "Why, you damn' near had that big stiff licked, and him twice your size!"

"And if you hadn't stepped in he'd 'a' stomped hell outa me," reminded Henderson gratefully. "I—I'm sure as hell obliged."

"Aw, forget it," O'Neil, embarrassed, said deprecatingly. "Let's go get plastered up. Maybe you can do the same for me some day."

"KNOW where a man can get a job?" asked the little fellow gravely as the druggist finished his iodine and sticking plaster attentions and turned toward O'Neil.

"A job?" Through hammered, closing eyes the big man looked the little fellow over. Absurdly small, albeit well muscled, the other had been painfully battered. The nerve with which he clung to his calm was evident. The big man nodded admiringly.

"Well I reckon," he said. "We need a man on our lease right now. A man—I reckon you'll fill the bill right well."

"I sure need a job," admitted Henderson with forced lightness. "Broke—ain't eat for two days now," with an attempt at a smile.

"Ain't eat! Well, for cryin' out loud! And you taking on a heavy! C'mon, you half pint wildcat, let's go eat and then get you that job."

The voracity with which the little fellow wolfed down his meal demonstrated plainly enough the truth of his admission.

"I'll owe you for this," he said defiantly, slashing into his sixth huge potato. "Pay you outa my first pay."

"You go chase yourself," retorted O'Neil good naturedly. "All you gotta do is feed me some time, maybe. G'wan eat; I like to see a man eat like a man oughta."

The other smiled gratefully and attacked his meal with renewed gusto.

"I feel a thousand per cent. better," he declared at last, pushing back his empty plate with a sigh. "Guy, that sure hit the spot!"

"More?" asked O'Neil.

"No thanks. I'm plumb full. Now, shall—can we go see about that job?"

"We'll go see the field superintendent," declared O'Neil. "He's over the river on the big lease. C'mon, we'll go now."

"Who you with?" asked Henderson hesitantly as they went out into the crude new street to O'Neil's battered car, parked by the dirt sidewalk.

"Plains," answered O'Neil readily. "I'm on their Number 4-D well on the Houston lease over here in Crockett right now. Headquarters and everything is on their big lease over in Pecos."

They climbed into the car and O'Neil sent it jolting speedily down the wide single street of the new town, toward the ford across the shallow, bitter Pecos River.

On every side, dotting the mesquite, clambering high on the steep, savage walls of sand and rock that closed the valley in, on the river banks, even in the water itself, were wells, mostly insignificant looking, portable affairs, like water well drilling machines, using a single mast instead of a derrick, although here and there a few standard oil well derricks towered.

A wild confusion of batteries of tanks, pipelines spreading everywhere like giant spider webs, buildings, boilers, tents, hundreds of branching, truck pounded trails; separators, producing wells, moving trucks laden with every conceivable variety of load from oil well casing to drug sundries for new stores; light cars, supply depots, tank farms, camps, whatnot added action to the scene.

It was the Yates field on the Pecos River, the greatest shallow oil field the world had ever known.

A LITTLE more than a year before, in October, 1926, the Mid-Kansas Oil and Gas Company, drilling in conjunction with the Transcontinental Company what they had expected to be merely a series of dry holes in Pecos County, to fulfill their agreements and hold leases in Crockett, over the river, had struck oil—a roaring gusher—at the astoundingly shallow depth of 1,085 feet.

Difficult of access, remote from railroads, lacking pipelines, far from bases of supplies, in a country virtually desolate, the new field had developed slowly. Far faster, of course, had been the development than a novice might have expected, yet to an oil man, accustomed to the astonishing celerity of real oil booms, the pace had been tardy.

There were still less than one hundred wells completed in the field, yet they figured on the basis actual hour gages arbitrarily multiplied by twenty-four (the only method possible for determining what the potential daily production might be, while entire lack of facilities for handling the oil made it imperative to keep the wells pinched down) was beyond 600,000 barrels a day, far above the world's record mark, set the preceding summer by the mighty Seminole field in Oklahoma.

There were now three new towns in the

great field. Iraan, combining the Christian name of Ira Yates, owner of the ranch on which the strike had been made, and that of his wife, Ann, was the largest. Around the famous red barn, solitary landmark in the wilderness by which perspiring scouts had steered their course to the discovery well, a second town called Red Barn was growing. And across the Pecos, in Crockett County, was Grube, youngest and lustiest of them all.

The hammered road pitched down into the cut banked gash through which ran the clear, sparkling, bitter waters of the Pecos, twenty feet wide perhaps at most, easily fordable by automobiles, and so hard that as the drillers of the river bed wells said, "it took a whole day just to drill through the water!"

Swinging to the left, then whirling quickly right again, up the pitching slope of a ravine bank, the road went sprawling through Red Barn, with the great Mid-Kansas camp nestled against the savage valley wall to the left under a giant "Mid-Kansas" worked in white rocks on the slope, and closer in, the famous Number 2-C Yates gusher, the well which had gaged at the rate of 65,880 barrels a day potential production, startling the whole oil world.

THROUGH Iraan, built Texas town fashion around a big, square plaza, the two men went; then on up the Rankin road until they came to a neat, gray and white camp, orderly rows of buildings, curiously reminiscent of a war-time cantonment. Here, at the huge headquarters building marked by the sign, "Plains Petroleum Corporation", O'Neil stopped his car with a jerk.

"Come on," he invited cheerfully. "Let's go see the big boss."

Henderson squared his shoulders.

"I'm ready," he said bravely.

They entered a long hall, debouching at the far end into a large room cut in twain by a railing behind which labored numerous men in combinations of office and field garb; and behind these opened several doors variously marked "Private", "Geologist", "Field Superintendent" and "Production".

"Old Man in?" O'Neil asked one of the workers.

"He's in," assented the clerk addressed. "I'll see if he can see you."

From the office marked "Superintendent" came a lusty, leather throated bellow.

"O'Neil? That you? What the hell d'you want now? Come here!"

Grinning, O'Neil hurdled the railing, motioning the flustered Henderson to follow, and entered the lion's den.

At a great flat topped desk piled in wild confusion with maps, books, legal documents, bottles of oil, strange and assorted packets of every size and shape, sat a huge, red faced pirate of a man, his close cropped hair and close cropped mustache alike a fiery, startling red, salted with gray.

"Oklahoma! What the devil ails you now?" this apparition bellowed. "Sound off!"

"Nothing, chief," grinned O'Neil, unabashed. "I've got you a good man to work with us on the D lease, 's all."

"A man!" roared the pirate. "Gosh! I don't need a man! This him? Why, damn it, fella, he ain't bigger'n a split pea!"

"He was licking a pipeliner when they ganged him and I sorta horned in," put in O'Neil blandly. "A guy twice his size."

"The hell he was," declared the superintendent, impressed. "Fella, you sure don't look big enough to—well you never can tell. Worst lickin' I ever took in my life was from a little guy, no bigger'n you. Beat hell outa me, he did. You wanta job?"

"I—I sure do," affirmed Henderson stoutly, impelled by a surreptitious kick from O'Neil.

"All right, give your name to the timekeeper," growled the superintendent. "Tell him I said put you on the D lease morning tower* as general flunky. What's your name?"

* A corruption of "tour", pronounced and usually spelled as given. A shift or working period. The morning tower usually works from midnight until noon, the afternoon tower from noon until midnight.

"Henderson," managed the little man faintly.

"Pee Wee or Big Boy?" pursued the superintendent brutally.

"Neither. Half Pint—full measure," retorted Henderson, stung to anger.

"Donahue's mine," snapped the big man abruptly, thrusting out a hard, ham-like paw. "Gladda meetchu. You remember, you're a Plains man now. We work like hell, fight like hell, and if I catch you drinkin' like hell I'll sure kick the holy hell outa you and it's your neck! G'wan now, get your John Henry on the payroll."

Impelled by O'Neil, Henderson backed confusedly out of the office, stammering incoherently. In a muddle he gave his name to a timekeeper, heard O'Neil claim him for a bunkie, was propelled out into the sunlight again.

"What—what ails that guy?" he sputtered. "I thought he was going to bite my head off. Is he crazy or something?"

"Oh that's just Bill Donahue," explained O'Neil good naturedly. "Fella, that guy's a prince! He's the best field superintendent in the Mid-Continent, bar none, and don't you forget it! He'll blister your hide off—and raise your pay. That's the kind of a guy he is!"

THEY drove slowly down the long, military-like street of the camp, drew up by a large gray building.

"This is our bunkhouse," explained O'Neil, disembarking. "We gotta shack over on the D lease where we stay part of the time, but usually we hang out around here. I'm gonna pound my ear. If I was you I'd take some of the same. We go on at midnight you know."

Entering the building, the military air was sustained by the sleeping quarters, curiously like squad rooms, each with its rows of cots, some occupied, some empty. A central washroom and showers carried the resemblance still farther.

"That's your cot," said O'Neil, pointing to an unused bed. "The washroom's right out there and you can get drinking water in the cooler, in the hall. And if I was you I'd catch me a little shut-eye too, partner. You'll need it."

Undressing rapidly, the big tooldresser threw himself on his bunk and almost instantly was asleep, breathing with long, even snores.

More slowly Henderson prepared for slumber. He took a shower, furtively using a forgotten towel, looked hopelessly at his dirty clothing, crawled naked between the covers, and slowly but surely drifted away into deep waters of sleep, to the lullaby of the walking beam, throbbing on a well far up on the hillside. At 10:30 the big tooldresser awoke him and he dressed hurriedly, listening to the steady, orderly confusion of sound coming from the field. Shivering, he stepped out into the chilly night air, gazing with interest at the thousands of glaring lights down the valley, marking drilling wells.

There is no night in a developing oil field, no night, no day, no Sundays, no holidays; only ceaseless activity.

"We'll eat a bite at the mess hall before we leave," O'Neil informed him. "C'mon, they'll take it out of your pay anyway."

Hot, bitter, gratifying coffee, ham and eggs, thick wedges of pie, and they were on their way, jolting through sleeping Iraan, past brilliantly lighted drilling wells, resembling nothing so much as strange riding devices at a carnival; on through Red Barn, through the black, rushing waters of the Pecos, glittering in the lights from the river bed wells; through the mesquite and cactus to the Plains D lease, down the river.

Here the Plains company was drilling a long line of tests, feeling blindly for the edge of the great pool. Numbers 1 and 2, so O'Neil explained, had been dry. Number 3-D had found gas, only a moderate amount, virtually worthless in this area, remote from pipelines and markets.

Numbers 4 and 5, closer in, were still drilling, Number 4 at 750 feet, Number 5 at 450. All were small, portable rigs, using single masts, with the exception of Number 1, which had been a standard derrick and which was to be drilled on for a deep test later.

They jolted swishingly through the dark brush, into the light around the 4-D.

Number 4-D was drilling, the walking beam smashing regularly up and down, the crashing strokes setting the crazy shelter around the hole a-quiver.

A fat, flabby man, his face a curious corpse-like color in the electric light, stood watching another man, obviously the driller, feeling the stroke with his hand on the cable.

"That's Miller, the drilling superintendent," said O'Neil dryly. "C'mon, meet the skunk of the outfit."

"Well?" growled the fat man as the two came into the half-shelter around the well.

"This is Henderson, our new roustabout," O'Neil explained. "Donahue put him on."

"What the hell does Donahue think I'm running over here—a kindergarten?" shouted the fat man. "Sending me half size kids! What can you do, anyway—carry water, maybe?"

"You step outside and I'll show you," invited Henderson, eyes narrowed to slits. "I may be little, but—well, do you want to try me?"

"Why should I fight a bum?" inquired the drilling superintendent caustically. "Did Donahue actually hire you? Did he even see you?"

"He did—both," affirmed O'Neil frostily. "I heard him put him on myself. What about it?"

The fat man looked the two over with unconcealed disgust, letting his little, pig-like eyes flutter languidly.

"You won't last long," he said nastily to the little man. "You either, O'Neil. I'll be watching you."

"Whenever you feel like canning me you just drop around—you and who else?" snarled O'Neil.

"Don't worry, you'll get yours, buddy," returned the drilling superintendent, waddling slowly toward a car parked in the shadows. "Come on, Anderson!"

The lank driller at the casing head favored them with an elaborate wink, crossed his eyes, pushed up the tip of his big nose with an oily finger, jerking his head significantly toward the departing drilling superintendent; then leisurely picked up coat and lunch bucket and followed in his wake.

THE CAR'S lights came on, swept in a bouncing circle to the trail back toward the Pecos; and another lank, long mustached, sad looking man came out of the housing around the engine and stood by the temper screw, smiling mournfully.

"Howdy, Oklahomy," he said in a languid, drawling voice. "How aih yoh this mawnin'?"

"Feeling mighty pert, Cal," grinned O'Neil, dancing a half shuffle. "How you making it? This is Henderson, our new teamster, roustabout, water carrier et al on this lease, Cal. Half Pint, this is Calhoun Armistead, Confederacy Jones, our driller and the best damn' hole maker in the Pecos."

"How aih yoh—Half Pint did he say?" the lanky one greeted Henderson, offering a gnarled claw of a hand. "Call me Cal—that hain't mah really name Oklahoma hyah tells yoh nohow. Oklahomy, he's a damn' Yankee an' don' know no betteh. Ah'm right glad to have yoh."

"I'm sure glad to be here," replied Henderson gratefully.

"Step in theah by the fyah an' set down, boys," the sad driller invited them. "Hain't nothin' t' do foh a right smaht while. Ah'll want yoh t' go oveh to the Number 2 foh a baileh befo' mawnin' but they hain't no huh'ey."

They ducked into the rude housing around the hole, sank thankfully down on the makeshift lazy bench beside the comfortable glow of a round iron drum inside which gas burned merrily.

"Well, here you are, guy," declared O'Neil gravely. "You've got a job, but I'm sure afraid you got an enemy in that guy, Miller. I'm poison to him because he can't fire me—Old Man won't let him. And he didn't just exactly act like he was going to love you either."

CURIOUSLY the ill assorted friendship of Half Pint and O'Neil grew closer as days went on.

Because O'Neil was a big, husky, good humored, good looking giant who never patronized him, who treated him always exactly as an equal, who, in short, epitomized the character Henderson passionately wished himself to be, the little fellow began fairly to idolize the big man, in a pathetic, wistful fashion. And for no particular reason, apparently, O'Neil returned the affection in his warm hearted, Irish way.

The little man's deftness in the thousand and one tasks around an active lease first aroused his approving comment.

"Where'd you learn so much about lease work?" he asked curiously.

"I was raised in oil fields," replied Half Pint bitterly. "I ought to know how! They just got the idea a man ain't any good in the oil fields unless he's big."

It was this deftness, acquired heaven knows where, that undoubtedly saved the little man from speedy firing by Miller, the drilling superintendent. A bully, with the bully's usual streak of cruelty in his nature, the drilling superintendent lost no opportunity for torturing the little fellow, assigning him nasty jobs far overtaxing his small stature, watching him like a hawk for some excuse to hand him his time.

Hired by the big boss himself and with the fully competent, husky O'Neil keeping a watchful eye on him, Half Pint was too strongly entrenched to discharge without excuse. But, hating the little man from the start, with that queer, unreasonable dislike of natural enemies, the drilling superintendent bided his time, goading and waiting. Even a superworker, he knew, will slip eventually.

The silent battle between laborer and boss drew O'Neil unconsciously closer to the under dog and considerably faster than might otherwise have been the case. A happy-go-lucky Irishman, he had been friendly with everybody, but curiously enough close friends with practically none, until little Half Pint had chanced along like a lost pup, to step so theatrically under his protection.

By the time they had finished the Number 4-D as a small gasser, three weeks after Henderson had come on the lease and had moved on to the Number 6-D, almost on the riverbank, the big tooldresser and the small roustabout were sharing safety razor blades and confiding to each other intimate, personal secrets.

"That's my girl," said O'Neil abruptly one afternoon as they loafed, off duty, in the bunkhouse on the lease. "Isn't she a lulu?"

He showed Henderson a small photo nestling in the cover of his old fashioned hunting case watch; the picture of a pretty laughing girl with crisp, curling bobbed hair, wide, merry eyes, the free air of a daughter of the open about the poise of her head and shoulders.

"She's a mighty pretty woman, Oklahoma," declared Half Pint earnestly, staring at the likeness. "If she's crazy enough to take you, you're a lucky man."

"Sure and don't I know it?" smiled the big man whimsically.

"We're going to get married when they make me a driller," he went on, gazing affectionately at the picture. "Already got my house picked out in the married row over in camp, and Donahue says I can have it the minute I qualify."

"That's fine, Oklahoma," said Half Pint wistfully. "I—I reckon I'll be losing you after that, yes?"

"Heck, no!" denied the big worker scornfully. "We've adopted each other or something, Ha' Pint. We'll be just the same, you and me."

"Maybe so, Oklahoma," agreed Henderson with foreboding. "Anyway I'll be glad you were lucky."

"She's coming through Rankin Saturday on her way to visit her grandpa and grandma," O'Neil continued dreamily. "You and me are going to get off a while and drive over and see her. I sure want her to know you—I've told her a lot about you in my letters and she sure wants to meet you."

"Oklahoma, she won't want me tagging

along with you," protested Half Pint.

"You're funny," retorted O'Neil indulgently. "Certainly she'll want you. Ain't you gonna be best man?"

THAT NIGHT at the well old Calhoun Jones, the driller, stamped uneasily about, pausing at intervals to stare intently down into the black round hole, touch the cable and listen with cautioning uplifted finger like some cadaverous oracle.

"We eh gonna hit somethin' befo' mawnin'," he croaked prophetically. "Ah feel hit in mah bones. Betteh douse thet fiah in theah, boys. Hit's gonna be gas. Ah feels hit a-suh'gin an' a-boilin', 'way down deep!"

O'Neil, unoccupied for the moment, winked at Henderson gravely. And little Henderson, hanging around the well as he always did when jobs elsewhere on the lease did not prevent, smiled uneasily.

In the dark hour just before dawn the gas came. The throbbing cable in the hole slacked suddenly, cracked stiff again, hung straight and still as the driller shut off power. There came a mutter from the black unfathomable depths of the hole, a rising rumble, a scream, a tornado of rocks, water and slime, with the roar of a million cannon, all firing at the speed of machine guns.

"Rotten gas! Get—" shouted old Cal with a wild gesture, turning to run, the rest of his warning drowned in the rocketing roar.

Leaping frantically to their feet from the lazy bench, O'Neil and Henderson dived madly for the narrow opening to the outside. O'Neil made it in a single leap. Tripping, Henderson fell sprawling in the doorway. The sharp, rotten odor of the gas, like the noxious stench from decaying flesh, filled his nostrils, there was a sickly sweetish taste in his mouth and he was out, scrambling crazily on hands and knees, bounding erect to run.

As he hurled himself to his feet in blind panic he crashed full tilt into another figure which flung crushing arms about him, seized his shoulders and jerked him away in giant, flying leaps.

Fifty paces from the well the wild flight stopped.

"Ha' Pint! You all right?" came O'Neil's anxious voice in his ear.

"Oklahoma! Were you coming back for me? Why—why—", spluttered Half Pint hoarsely.

"Man, that stuff is hydrogen sulphide!" declared O'Neil vehemently. "One good breath of it would kill you deader'n heck!"

"But you were coming back! You were! And you dragged me out. Oklahoma, I—I—"

"Aw, forget it," advised O'Neil, embarrassed. "I was just gonna ask you did you bark your shins. You're my partner, ain't you?"

Calhoun Jones, the driller, came stalking calmly through the brush, talking to himself in a high, whining voice, audible even above the roar.

"Damn' gas!" he was saying. "Doggone nuisance anyhow! Oklahomy! Ha' Pint! Oh, theah yoh aih! Whah was yoh-all runnin' to—Chiny? Jest a gas pocket. Hit'll quit befo' long. Mesquite scratch yoh-all? Damn' neah toah mah hide off'n me, hit did."

"That's hydrogen sulphide!" shouted O'Neil, to be heard above the clamor. "Poison gas! Deadly!"

"Yeah, Ah know," agreed Calhoun mournfully. "Kinda reckoned 'twould be. Mebbe hit will kill off some of these heah coyotes, yoh suppose?"

TRUE to the driller's prediction, in about ten minutes the roar slackened, died away at a whistle, then finally was merely a whispering from the hole. The first faint streaks of the dawn began to show in the east, and the lights of cars, attracted by the roar, glittered palely, winding out along the trail from the main field.

The first car purred up, stopped, and the three went over to where it waited in the trail.

"What the hell happened?" the thick voice of Miller, the drilling superinten-

dent, came from the shadow under the top. "You bums asleep on the job?"

"Jest a leetle gas blowout," explained Calhoun Jones wearily. "We-all soh'ta got out heah so's we wouldn't be a woh'y-in' an' a-troublin' hit. Rotten gas—smell hit."

"Rotten gas, huh!" explained the lease boss sharply, sniffing at the faint, foul odor that lay in the air. "Well, all right, it was just a pocket. Go in there and shut her down until it's light enough to see."

"It won't hurt you!" he barked sarcastically as the driller hesitated slightly. "Go on, both of you! Henderson? What the hell you hanging around this well for? You go with them!"

"Yoh comin' too, mebbe?" suggested old Calhoun, gently sardonic. "No? Well, well! Come on, boys, Ah reckon we-all jest has to do hit ouh ownse'fs."

Moving in from the windward side the driller made a quick inspection, returning almost instantly to the two partners waiting beside the boiler.

"Yo shut th' boileh off?" he asked. "Fine! They hain't nothin' much to do 'till mawnin'. The tools is sho' blowed up in the hole."

Going back to the waiting car, the three reported their findings, received a hearty, though cautiously indirect cursing for their pains, and finally were told to wait until morning and the rest of the crew arrived.

"And now we aih gonna have mo' ni-ce visitehs like thet ornary cuss!" mourned the driller, as the drilling superintendent jolted away. "They will be mo' damn' fools comin' down this heah road astin' questions that yoh kin count fo' the nex' two days."

Wherein, naturally enough, he was nearly correct.

BUT by noon the well was in shape so that it could be left to the afternoon tower. With a weary sigh the morning tower knocked off and O'Neil started briskly for his car.

"C'mon, Ha' Pint," he commanded. "Hit it up! We've got to get cleaned up and get to Rankin before three."

Weary but interested, Henderson obeyed.

It was some thirty miles to Rankin, booming oil town, the nearest railroad point. Thirty miles, not so good, not so bad, past camp after camp, over the Pecos via a narrow wooden bridge, on to the main highway, a truck, pounded trail, wide, dusty and hard.

They swung into Rankin, crossed the tracks to the short main street, stopped at a filling station on the corner for a last hasty sprucing, and went to the depot.

The train pulled in. A vision—to Henderson at least it was nothing less—dropped from the steps and fairly fell into the big tooldresser's arms.

"Honey, honey, honey, sure and you're a sight for sore eyes," he cried, kissing her, cheerfully oblivious to the grinning stares from the crowd.

"Oklahoma! You're looking wonderful yourself!" the vision returned enthusiastically. "You—you old dear." She kissed him. "Now, young man, turn me loose before we make a spectacle."

Unabashed, O'Neil released her, stepped back, holding her hand, smiling excitedly.

"Margaret, I want you to meet the best little guy in the world," he cried. "My partner, Ha' Pint Henderson. Come shake hands with the future Mrs. O'Neil, you fighting runt!"

Tonguetied with embarrassment, Henderson shook the goddess' hand, staring dumbly.

"Do you think I'll do?" asked the vision, smiling. "Really I don't look quite this terrible when I'm not a wreck from train riding."

Henderson flushed.

"You—you'll have to excuse me, Miss Margaret," he blurted. "You're the prettiest woman I ever saw in my life!"

It was Margaret's turn to blush. O'Neil guffawed.

"How's that for fast work, Margaret?" he roared. "Right off the handle! Good thing you don't live close or he'd be stealing you from me."

Margaret smiled.

"He might at that," she admitted charmingly. "Mister Henderson, I think you're a ladies' man!"

"He's a shiek," affirmed O'Neil. "Margaret, darn it, I wish you could stay over a while. I've got a world of things to tell you."

Sensing a hint, Henderson fumbled at his hat.

"You two want to talk," he said awkwardly. "I'll go buy a cigar. I'll sure be back before the train leaves though, Miss Margaret, honest."

He was rewarded with a brilliant smile and faded away, while the engaged pair paced the platform, arm in arm, engrossed in conversation.

The engine bell began to ring and O'Neil reluctantly led the girl toward the car steps. Henderson stood waiting shyly a few steps away, hat in hand.

"Goodby, honey," said the vision, kissing her fiancé affectionately. "Be a good boy. Mister Henderson! Oh, there you are. Goodby. Take good care of my man for me!"

"I sure will," promised the little man earnestly. "If you want me to I'll keep him wrapped in cotton wool for you."

"You do that," laughed Margaret. "You—you see, I like him quite a lot. Goodby!"

The conductor was waving his arm. She boarded the steps, smiling back at them from the vestibule. With a long, even surge the train pulled out and she was borne away, while the two stood together on the platform, waving disconsolately.

"Well, she's gone," said O'Neil with a sigh when the train was only a smudge in the distance. "Darn it! Isn't she a peach, Ha' Pint!"

"She sure is, Oklahoma," admitted the little man seriously. "You're a lucky guy! I wish—"

"What?" asked O'Neil absently. "Go on."

"Oh nothing. I—let's be getting back, Oklahoma. We'll have to sleep some."

Resignedly the big man followed the small one to their parked car and they set out on the return journey.

Abstractedly Henderson watched the fence posts rushing by. Lucky man, Oklahoma! He himself had had little experience with women. They didn't like runts—that way. Margaret now—if he had met her first— Oh no! You talked about wives and sweethearts and—well somehow life seemed always passing by a runt. Perhaps if he had met her first— Doggedly he refused to recognize his feelings. Not at first sight and with his partner's girl! No! Life, life—

They swept roaringly over the narrow bridge across the Pecos and the musing O'Neil, driving automatically, shook himself vigorously.

"Why all the noise?" he asked, cheerfully sardonic. "You're sure talking a lot this trip."

With a start Henderson came back to earth from his bitter wanderings.

"You've been making a lot too much noise yourself," he retorted. "Cat got your tongue?"

"Reckon so," assented O'Neil with a laugh. "Shake out of it, big boy! We're going to own some of these oil wells ourselves some day, you and me."

"Yeah?" commented Henderson dryly. "What we going to do? Steal some?"

"Sure," affirmed O'Neil. "Boy, I got ambitions, I have. You and me are gonna save some dough from now on and get us a drilling rig. Then we'll turn contractors and drill some wells for somebody and first thing you know we'll be operators, drilling our own producers for our own-selves, by gosh!"

"Yeah? Well, maybe so, Oklahoma. We can try, sure. No use not trying."

"You tell 'em!" applauded O'Neil. "We'll be rich yet, you see!"

AGAIN they took up the unending grind of work. The Number 6-D was completed as a gasser, contracted to help supply some of the field towns with fuel eventually, but for the present shut down; and they spudded in on the Number 7-D.

"This heah well," prophesied old Calhoun Jones mournfully, "will be a produceh. Mo', hit will be a sho' 'nough produceh, a gusseh, a ringtail, rootin', te'heh! Ah feels hit in mah bones."

Strangely, it seemed that he was right. At six hundred feet they struck the first oil, a thin, saturated stratum that for a time made better than twenty-five barrels an hour as they drilled. This they saved for the most part, running it into hastily erected tanks, drilling steadily on down after the big pay.

At 720 feet a small pocket of gas gave trouble and they diverted the flow into the greasewood on the leeward side and went on.

At 835 feet they struck again, a heavy flow of reeking crude that for a while seemed enough in itself to make a well. This too they shot into the tanks and, fearing that the small battery would soon be overflowing, Miller, the drilling superintendent, had a hasty dam thrown across the steep banked little gulch that zigzagged down to the Pecos between the well and the bunkhouse. This rude earthen storage, however, they did not have to use, as the flow stopped just before the last tank in the battery was full, and they drilled on.

The next day O'Neil was notified that he had been named driller on the Plains Number 1 Johnson wildcat test, far to the north-west, in Ward County. The test, miles from any other wells, even from previous human habitations, was to start in two weeks, and O'Neil, immediately upon completion of the Number 7-D, was to leave the Pecos and go to it.

Jubilantly he pounded Henderson on the back.

"I'm a driller!" he shouted. "That's all Margaret asked. We'll be married as soon as I can make arrangements. Mitt me, Ha' Pint, I'm practically married!"

"I'm sure glad, Oklahoma," said the little man earnestly. "She's a wonderful girl."

"Reckon I—I'll be losing you now," he added, after a pause. "Me here and you over in Ward. I'll hate to see you go, Oklahoma."

"Yeh," admitted O'Neil soberly. "I guess that's right; and sure I'll be missing you, Ha' Pint. But maybe I can get you transferred over to my well," more brightly.

"Maybe so. But you'll be getting married and—well, we'll keep track of each other anyway, won't we, Oklahoma?"

"We sure will that!" declared the big man stoutly. "You and me are partners, Ha' Pint. We're gonna be drilling contractors some day."

Changing wells, they had changed from the morning to the afternoon tower; Henderson, who had become a fixture with the crews on the old morning tower, being shifted with them. So it was that O'Neil and Henderson were at the well when it topped the big lime high, at 984 feet, and shot down to run and cement 8¼ inch casing before drilling into the big pay.

OLD CALHOUN JONES turned from examining the cuttings brought up by the bailer and heaved a mournful, gusty sigh.

"Well, boys, she aih all done, a'most," he said sadly. "This heah's a gusheh—high on th' structu'eh an' evuh'thing. Ah feels hit in mah bones. Sen' foh th' casin' crew."

The Plains casing crew—big, husky men—came on the job and set and cemented casing in short order, Calhoun and O'Neil aiding. It would require about ten days for the cement fastening the casing in a watertight joint to the caprock below to harden and set. After that they would drill out the wooden plugs forced down to the bottom of the hole to drive the cement out, drill into the pay sand below and complete the well.

O'Neil already was preparing to leave. In response to a barrage of fervid wires Margaret had capitulated. They would be married in three weeks, he gleefully told Henderson.

"And you're to be my best man," he declared firmly. "I don't know where or how we'll be married, but you're gonna be

there and maybe I'll even let you kiss the bride."

"Aw, Oklahoma, I'll make a fool of myself!" protested Henderson faintly. "You better let me just send you a wedding present and stay away!"

"You're as crazy as you look!" stated O'Neil cheerfully. "You're gonna be there and there's no backing out. I need support, man!"

While they waited for the cement to set, in a flurry of other details the drilling crew spread elsewhere, leaving the well standing, for the most part, with only one man idly guarding the property.

On the third day Henderson found himself the watcher. In mid-afternoon Miller, the drilling superintendent, drove up.

"Henderson, we won't be needing you after we complete this well," he said abruptly, entering the shelter. "Orders to slow up work until this field gets more pipelines and storage. I'm giving you your notice now."

"Won't need me! You mean—you're firing me?"

"Right. We don't need you—never have for that matter. You just ain't big enough for oil field work, buddy. We can't use runts down here. If I was you I'd go back to some city. You won't find anything down here. This is a man's country!"

"You go to hell!" said Henderson, coldly raging. "Take your glasses off or I'll knock them into your spine!"

The drilling superintendent recoiled a hasty step.

"I don't fight with laborers—or babies," he said nastily, turning out of the shelter, toward his car. "You heard me, Henderson, you have your time."

He climbed hurriedly into his car and drove away. In black anger Henderson watched him go.

Bitterly he realized what the man's words meant, the truth behind them. The field was slacking up. Pitifully insufficient pipeline outlets to markets, insufficient storage, an already enormous production completed and bottled up, low prices for what oil could be sent out—there would be little chance for him, a runt, to find a new job now.

There might be ways to keep from starving. Dishwashing in a restaurant, carrying water for a pipeline gang, menial jobs. But in all probability these too would be filled. He would be just a bum again, on his uppers, drifting.

Curiously the trifle of a wedding present for his big partner drifted uppermost in his troubled mind. He wanted passionately to give a nice present, a truly grateful gift, something splendid—and costly. Should he blow his insignificant hoard and take a chance, or . . .

DREARILY he wandered out into the greasewood, a little distance from the well, to the precipitous bank of the ravine which cut crookedly across the lease between the well and the bunkhouse. Near the bank he sat down on a rusted joint of large size casing, staring moodily down into the hollow, his thoughts drifting on black waters.

For a long, long time he sat very still, brooding. Mechanically he lighted a cigaret, puffed tastelessly, then let it fume slowly away into ashes under his nerveless fingers.

A chaparral bird, wild, wary, queerly like a fighting cock in appearance, poked a bright eyed head from the brush on the other side of the ravine, stared at him curiously, then started down into the hollow with the characteristic, scuttling gait of its kind.

Abstractedly he started to flip the cigaret butt at the bird; then, startled, threw back his head and stared. Something was bothering the bird. It was choking, down on its side, kicking and fluttering convulsively. Suddenly it stiffened and lay still.

A cold shiver went over the little man as he stared down at the stricken bird.

"God!" he ejaculated. "My God!" jerking abruptly to his feet and backing away from the brink.

The hollow was full of hydrogen sulphide, invisible, deadly poison gas, heavier than air flowing, no doubt unseen,

from the Number 6-D or from the battery of tanks filled with the reeking crude, farther up the ravine; flowing down the still hollow to bank up against the dam the workers had thrown across.

With a shudder he dropped the smoldering cigaret, stamped it into the dust. Had he flicked the thing into the hollow, instant explosion probably would have wiped him out, he thought.

Curiously cold, he went soberly back up to the well and sat down on a timber. That bird kicking, the cigaret poised in his fingers—little chilled drops of sweat stood out on his forehead.

The sun was going down. Long shadows crept across the valley; here and there lights began to glow palely. Far away he saw the waters of the Pecos gleaming crimson in the sunset light. The sun went down and the bright ribbon of waters faded into indistinguishable, greenish gray.

A halloo from across the ravine in the direction of the bunkhouse aroused him and he raised his head. Plunging through the brush, running, cheerfully disregarding both the longer truck road crossing the ravine above the tanks and the path that used the dam for a bridge, Oklahoma O'Neil was cutting straight through, shouting as he ran.

"Henderson! Ha' Pint! Where are you? Good news! Oh, Ha' Pint!"

With a scream Henderson came to his feet.

"No! No! Go back! Wait! Stand still!" he shouted frenziedly. "Not there! Oh, my God!"

For O'Neil, seeing him, had darted straight toward him, straight into the poison filled pit.

Sobbing, the little man ran like mad through the brush toward the hollow, oblivious to the thorns and limbs that slashed blood from his unprotected face.

"O'Neil!" he cried. "Oklahoma! Oh, my God, my God!"

Unhesitating, he drove through to the steep bank of the near side and glared down into the thickening shadow, wildly searching.

Half way across, his head pillowed on his arms, just as he had fallen, lay O'Neil, like an exhausted man asleep.

"O'Neil," cried the little man with a sob. "Partner!"

With a deep breath he leaped from the bank, straight down into invisible death below. The jolt of his landing threw him to his knees, knocking half the precious air from his lungs. In an awkward, frantic scramble, he reached his friend.

Madly, holding his breath, he heaved the big unconscious form up against his breast and turned back toward the bank.

His lungs were bursting. His eyes stung, blurred; the weight against his chest was an overpowering, intolerable burden. Blindly he staggered forward, each step an age of torture.

Against the bank. Six feet straight up. He was blind now. His breast a hell of fire. The agonized lungs could hold no longer. With a final, supreme burst of strength he heaved the big body up, out of the hollow of death, sprawling into safety on the edge of the bank. The effort burst the imprisoned air from his lungs like a bursting balloon; irresistibly he sucked in a full breath of the gas.

There was an overpowering, sickly sweetish taste in his mouth, a roar in his ears, the whirring of mighty wings. Sobbing, he sank down against the bank.

"A wedding present," the words went clearly across his mind in a last, kaleidoscopic flash. "A wedding present!"

Then he lay quite still. And the twilight, gathering, lent curious exaggeration to the little figure, so that, for the moment, it seemed man's size at last.

The Exodus of Toby

By HUGH PENDEXTER

CHAPTER I

PILGRIM'S LUCK

TOBY LANG'S home town voted him to be exactly the right type to conquer California. His hair was red and his eyes were blue. A congenital inclination to grin gave him an excellent capacity for making friends. His fitness for the gold country, however, did not depend entirely upon his amiable traits. His home was Hartford, Connecticut, where he worked at making revolvers for Samuel Colt. California was supposed to be thickly populated by shooting men. This favorite son had great skill with firearms. Revolvers fascinated him from the day he saw the model used during the Mexican War. Much of his spare time had been spent in practising with these revolving pistols. Other young men might spend their money on dress, drink or cards; but young Lang nicked his weekly pay by purchasing ammunition.

Being normal, he was in love. She was the parson's daughter. She frowned on lethal weapons. She criticized his occupation. She ridiculed his journeying to California. She prophesied that the Pacific Coast would whip him. He vowed he would not return home a beaten man. Self-respect impelled him to go once she had spoken derisively.

A Novelette of an Eastern lad who went seeking California gold

He was homesick all the way to California. It began before he was ten miles from town. He often wondered what imp of the perverse had prodded him along when he would have preferred to turn back. San Francisco worried him with its strange sights, its hurly-burly, and its glamorous babble of gold. He had planned to tarry in the city and learn intimate details about mining and mines, but the bustling confusion drove him away after twenty-four hours.

He landed in Sacramento with three thousand dollars, two beautiful .44's, each weighing two pounds and eleven ounces. He carried money and guns in a large leather bag, along with his clothes and few personal effects. He had made himself an excellent belt, with holsters, but the long journey and the one day in San Francisco had convinced him that unarmed men need have no fear unless confronted by robbers. Even in the latter contingency he believed he would prefer the loss of his savings to the killing of a man.

Much of his homesickness wore away during the hundred and twenty-five miles on the steamer *Yosemite* to Sacramento. Then again, Toby was a great listener. With every one talking gold, he overheard and absorbed much information, the bulk of which he did not understand. He was disappointed in not finding California of the early Fifties. He feared that

the country had lost all its romance.

An hour after reaching Sacramento he interrupted his plans for pressing on to the Yuba diggings. He watched a thimble rigger. The man's outfit consisted of three wooden thimbles and a pellet of paper, a slim paraphernalia for earning a living. But after watching the fellow hook the gullible, Toby decided his income was entirely out of proportion to his outlay. The rigger stood with his left foot resting on a low box and used his left thigh for a table. In shifting the thimbles about his hands moved slowly, almost awkwardly, as if he had not quite got the knack of manipulation; or, as if the pellet were either very heavy, or very precious. And yet when he accepted ounce bets he invariably won.

Lang whispered to the man beside him—

"Of course, there is some catch to it."

The man, in broken boots and castoff clothes, nodded and muttered:

"He's slick, that Powder Williams, but he can be caught. I'd cook him in a minute if I wasn't hogged out. Sold a claim for three hundred dollars that paid seventy-five thousand inside of two weeks."

LANG decided that Williams' nickname was suggested by the mottled appearance of his face. It was very amusing to the Easterner to observe the onlookers' lack of sophistication. Of course, the pellet was never where it seemed to be. Repeated efforts to pick it out from under the last thimble it was seen to enter tended to cheapen one's estimate of California astuteness. After three more victims had backed their faith in their eyesight, and had turned away defeated, Toby explained to his right hand neighbor:

"That one man should be fooled is easy to understand. But why should the others be fooled in the same way? The little wad of paper is never under the thimble you think it is."

"Son, you've got an old head on young shoulders," murmured the man. "I reckon you're right. Yes, siree! Never bet on the thimble you're sure is covering the paper. That's it. Only you put it better'n I can."

Toby flushed with pleasure. Praise from a very dilapidated Sir Hubert, yet very pleasing withal. He modestly added—

"Where I worked you had to have keen eyes."

The man in broken boots nudged Toby's elbow and nervously whispered—

"Look!"

Toby switched his gaze back to the gambler, now haranguing for more victims. Powder Williams was earnestly addressing the men on his right. In mechanically moving the thimbles while he invited bets, his genius must have slept; for in shifting the thimbles he not only permitted the pellet to be plainly seen, but in setting down the middle thimble he had left the pellet entirely outside its cover. The man in the broken boots reached out his hand and delicately dislodged the pellet.

The gambler slowly swung his head about to invite bets from the left. Toby Lang thrilled as he realized he had the man at his mercy. The man was a common sharper. One's honor need not shrink from taking every advantage against him.

"Give me what you think is right," whispered Broken Boots.

Toby experienced a qualm of repugnance. Then he told himself that he was but an instrument of justice. He decided to strike quick and hard. This decision quite swept him off his feet, for it called for action and some audacity in the face of much publicity. He knew he probably would be known as the young man who beat the thimble rigger at his own game. He nodded to his abetter.

"Is there any one here who will bet one or more ounces that he can pick out the little ball?" challenged the sharper. "If you win, I lose. It's under one of the thimbles. It's—"

"I'll bet ten ounces you can't pick it out," cried Toby Lang, his voice almost trembling because of his excitement.

The sharper stared at him coldly and replied:

"Friend, it's foolish to ask me to bet on my own game. Of course I know where it is."

"It'll be foolisher for you if you try'n' back down'n' refuse this young man's bet," hoarsely shouted the man in broken boots.

Others who had witnessed the byplay of the dislodged pellet endorsed this threat. The gambler appeared to be a trifled irritated, a trifle worried. Pushing back his soft hat and resting his hands on his hips he told the half circle of faces:

"I don't have to take this man's money to prove I know where I put the little pill. It's my business to know. I'd rather have him pick it out. I'd rather—"

"Stop right in your tracks!" sternly cried Broken Boots. "We've played your game your way. Now you'll play it our'n. My young friend bets ten ounces that you can't pick it out."

"That's so!" shouted another. "You come down on the talk and put up the dust."

POWDER WILLIAMS bowed to the inevitable and said to Toby:

"Do you want to go through with that bet? I'll warn you I know what I'm talking about. This is my game, you'll remember. I don't want it said you didn't have a square shake."

"I said ten ounces that you can't pick it out. I stick by my bet," Toby doggedly replied.

With another graceful bow Powder Williams surrendered, saying:

"Very well, I'd rather you'd bet that you could pick it out. But have it your own way. Put up your dust on the box here, eighteen dollars to the ounce. There's a bag of mine." And he dropped a buckskin bag by his left foot.

Toby fished out not dust but double and single eagles and nervously stacked them beside the dust. It thrilled him to realize that he was about to rake in a hundred and eighty dollars. He was almost regretting his action. Williams was a sharper but that scarcely excused a Toby Lang in sinking to a similar level. He knew the parson's daughter would be horrified. And yet he was pleased with himself. The girl had said he would be at the mercy of unprincipled men.

The gambler slowly pulled up his sleeves to show that there was to be no sleight of hand and held up his open palms for all to inspect. Then very gingerly he lifted the middle thimble and disclosed the pellet of paper, and quickly picked up the stakes and dropped them in them in the pocket of his natty sack coat. With a bow and smile to Toby he turned and made up the street.

Toby Lang was dazed. He could see the tiny pellet where Broken Boots had dropped it. He turned to express his amazement to his confederate, but the man had vanished. Guffaws and hooted derision exploded from the group. One man loudly cried:

"Of all the numbskull plays I ever see! Betting on another man's game!"

A fat man, weeping from mirth, managed to exclaim:

"But think of trying to beat Powder Williams of all men! That's the juice of the joke! That's the beauty of it!"

FEELING his face burning with the fires of the sunset, Toby hurried away. He picked no course, just walked blindly, careless of direction, and desirous only of escaping from the jibing voices. Water halted him, and he discovered he was back on the riverfront, and near the *Chrysopolis*, scheduled to leave for San Francisco at two o'clock. The last passengers were streaming aboard. Shame and chagrin sent him flying up the gangplank almost before he realized what he was doing. Injured pride held him there. Had he had time to collect his thoughts, to halt his routed spirit, he might have gone ashore and resumed his journey as planned. But the lines were cast off and the steamboat was sailing with the current back to Frisco.

He paid his five dollars and walked forward in a daze and endeavored to

rearrange his plans. For the first few miles he shut out the world and marveled that he had been such a silly fool. Broken Boots of course was the sharper's confederate. He had unerringly picked out the young New Englander as likely game. Back home a hundred and eighty dollars was a worthwhile sum. It was entitled to respect. He had thrown it away as if it had been so much dirt. What hurt worse than the loss of money was the loss of pride. His self-respect had received a damaging blow.

It was a bitter cud and he could not chew it all the way to the city. He began to hear men close by talking about the riches of Mokelumne Hill up in Calaveras County. He listened, to drown the silent inner voice of reproach. He was avid for information and the talk helped to dull the ache. He soon learned that the Mokelumne River had been flumed every year, which impressed him as being a sad reflection on the flumer's ability to do a good job. He also learned that Murphy's, Cave City and Douglas Flat were placer towns, while Angel's, West Point and Carson Hill were quartz mining towns. He was not interested in the latter, as he planned to wash gold instead of pounding it from rock.

The bars between Union and Clay Bars paid well. These, he learned, were on the Mokelumne. Seven Frenchmen had taken out a hundred and two pounds of gold in two days from Sandy Bar. Such talk made his flesh crawl. It also served to assuage his sorrows somewhat over losing nearly two hundred dollars on another man's game. Soon, listening, he was almost forgetting his troubles.

As the gossipers thinned out to refresh themselves at the bar he ventured to question a middle aged man. The man had faded blue eyes and a rusty beard, and was set on hair trigger for talk, and he promptly confessed that he had recently discovered the Big Blue Lead up near the Big Tree Grove.

"Where's that?" asked Toby in an awed voice.

"Calaveras County, where you can find everything from the richest placer to the richest quartz mine you ever see."

"What's the Big Blue Lead?" innocently asked Toby.

"Gadfrymighty! Be you that tender?" gasped the man. "Well, if that don't beat all natur'. Back in the East one could understand, but out here in Californy! See here, son. The Big Blue Lead is the one that supplies all the gold that's found in Sierra 'n' Placer Counties. Men been hunting for it ever since '50. Sometimes it's almost on top of the ground. Sometimes it's buried deep."

"And you came away and left it!" cried Toby.

"But no one knows where it is, but me. And if they did, who's going to steal it? I dug this out inside an hour, and then come down to Frisco to buy things and enjoy a little ride up the river and back."

As he spoke he pulled a heavy bag from under his coat and fondled it lovingly. He even loosened the puckering string and permitted Toby to glimpse the contents.

Toby drew a deep breath and confided:

"I think I'll go up there and hunt for gold. I ought to find some."

"If you ain't a plain lunkhead, and are willing to work, and if you have a grubstake, you will find some. Maybe a heap of it."

"I can work and am middling bright," said Toby. "I have about three thousand dollars."

"My name's Elijah Freeman," hurriedly said the man. "You're from the East and chuck full of vim and vigor. Of course you'll find it. What's your handle?"

"Toby Lang—Hartford, Connecticut."

"Brother Lang, two friends of mine, working on Eldorado Flat, took out seven thousand dollars in four months. Of course that ain't big, but they was satisfied with it as a starter."

"I'd say it was mighty fine!" exclaimed Toby.

"Fair to middling, for wages," carelessly agreed Mr. Freeman, "but we're all

after bonanza stuff. Well, it must be time for a mild snort of red liquor. Join me?"

FOR THE sake of further priceless information, rather than for the drink, Toby accompanied his new acquaintance to the bar. His gregarious instincts were rampant now. Chagrin and shame had receded to the background. He was responding to his environment, a golden environment, where one talked in thousands and estimated gold in pounds. The money lost to the thimble rigger seemed to be rather small potatoes. Men at the bar were loudly speaking of gold in pounds as unconcernedly as an Easterner would speak of codfish.

"I don't know much about prospecting," Toby confided to his companion, "but I'm keen to learn."

"Best way, Brother Lang, is to find a prospector who's got a good claim, and buy. A prospector's a curious animal. I know, as I've put in twelve years at it. A prospector never becomes rich. I mean the man who has the habit firmly fixed on him. No matter how rich his diggings are he's always hankering to go over to the next ridge and find better. He'll always sell, often for a song, or just for enough to grubstake him for a month or two."

"I'm very much obliged to you, Mr. Freeman. I'll buy a likely looking claim. They laughed at me back home for coming out here. There's a young lady I'm interested in, who can't understand how I could leave a good position, and everything else. But I'll show them. I'll never go back till I've made my pile."

"That's the ticket that'll send you home a rich man," warmly endorsed Freeman. "I've stuck to it and won out. My troubles are all over. I'm fixed so I can drop a few hundred dollars, or thousands if I take the notion, and it won't make much difference. Tables are filling up."

He referred to the card tables about the cabin. Men were winning and losing ounces of gold with much composure. This spectacle further helped Toby to minimize his experience with Powder Williams. He worked into a mood where he could even smile at his recent dismay. What were a couple of hundred dollars in a land of gold? The very name of the boat, *Chrysopolis*, somehow encouraged the sybarite in a man.

He felt that life was at its flood as he listened to Elijah Freeman's talk on miners and their luck. He liked Mr. Freeman. He liked his name, smacking as it did of old New England, of common sense, of shrewdness, of honesty and integrity. He believed Mr. Freeman to be one of those simple souls who lived right and did right from life long habit. They ate supper together and resumed their talk.

AT A LATE hour, when elderly men should be thinking of sleep, Mr. Freeman leaned forward and watched with glittering eye the finale of big betting on a nearby table. Turning to his companion, he confessed:

"It's got into the blood a bit. I played a little when a young man; then I quit because I couldn't afford it. Now that I can afford it I hanker to stir up my blood. You ever take a turn?"

"Yes, I've played. But for what you'd think was a small stake."

"Listen, Brother Lang. When you play poker just remember you're playing for chips," earnestly advised Mr. Freeman. "Forget what you paid for them. When you bet, just think of chips. If you don't keep that in mind, but keep thinking a chip cost you five dollars, you'll be hampering your style. Play like you would for fun. Now let's see if I can't scare up two or three more who ain't sharks. You stick here for a bit."

He wandered about the cabin and went outside. Finally he came back and reported:

"We're in luck. Found Quinlan, who runs a boot store in Frisco, and Rogers, who runs an eating place. I don't know any of the rest enough to trust them. Have to look out for sharpers. But four's

all right. I'll have to hunt around and get some of my dust changed into money as they waste it something cruel when they weigh it out, 'specially on a boat."

"How much do we, or I, need to start with?" nervously asked Toby.

"Oh, five hundred's all right, so long as you have another five hundred if you lose. But you can't lose much in a game with Quinlan and Rogers. I vow! I do wish I'd had sense enough to change some of my dust into eagles. I figger I lose ten per cent. by having it weighed. Any of the bartenders will be glad to change it for me; but you see that small square of plush under the scales? After he's finished his trick he'll pan more'n fifty dollars out of that. Just dust that drops down and is caught in the plush. They call it side money. They ain't over gentle about weighing dust, neither. Hope your money is in coin."

"Yes, eagles and double eagles," said Toby.

Freeman sighed and started to rise, his gaze fixed on the bar. Toby rested a hand on his arm and detained him, saying:

"Why, look here, Mr. Freeman. You've been very neighborly and helpful; you can take some of my money and settle after the game."

"Good! That'll be fine. There's six pounds of the simon pure article in my bag. Too heavy for a man to carry around. You advance me some eagles and keep the bag as security."

"No, no! Let me advance what you need. After the game is over—"

"No, siree! There's the bag. Tie it to your belt under your coat. You won't mind the weight while you're sitting down. If you can trust me I reckon I can trust you. There! Not a word." As he talked he finished transferring the heavy bag, which Toby tied on to his belt. "And here come the boys. Now we'll have some innocent fun."

The next moment Toby was being introduced to a fat roly-poly man, who was Quinlan, and to a thin, austere individual, who was Rogers. The latter was inclined to think they could have just as much sport with a five dollar limit as with a ten, which Mr. Freeman had suggested. Mr. Freeman was rather persistent, and Quinlan agreed with him. Mr. Freeman appealed to Toby. Because of loyalty to his new friend, Toby voted for a ten dollar limit although five dollars had seemed a terrific sum. He was ashamed to confess that he had never played for larger stakes than a ten cent limit.

EQUIPPED with five hundred dollars of Toby's gold pieces Mr. Freeman played sedately for a few hands and then took to plunging. Toby, playing carefully, decided that the old man was starved for a chance to spend money recklessly, inasmuch as the opportunity to do so had come to him in the evening of life. He had no girl back home: youth had departed from him. His Big Blue Lead would bring him but few thrills. Quinlan bantered Freeman good naturedly. Rogers grumbled and twitted him about being a Crœsus. Freeman seemed to enjoy the badinage and grew more reckless.

"I had you almost ready to drop," he would chuckle when his bluff was called.

Inside of an hour his five hundred dollars were gone and he borrowed another like sum. Toby felt responsible for him to a certain degree. By conservative playing he was a hundred dollars ahead, and he planned to hold it. Several times he believed that he had a chance to even up all his loss to the thimble rigger, but, upon taking a bold initiative, he was set back with a jolt.

At two o'clock in the morning Toby wished to stop. Freeman borrowed more eagles and vowed he would quit if he lost them. He was cleaned out on the next pot and true to his word he rose from the table.

It had been no enjoyment to Toby, except a certain nerve tingling which he could not analyze. After it was all over he felt elated, and his cheeks burned with the fever of the night's excitement. He had played for real stakes and had won a little over a hundred dollars.

"We'll step aside and square up, Mr. Freeman," he said.

Mr. Freeman yawned and blinked and said:

"Oh, for goodness sake, let's not bother with that now. Tippy boat, shaking scales and the like. Past my bedtime by hours. Take the bag to bed with you. I'll trust you with ten times as much."

Toby retired with the bag in his bed and with a .44 under his pillow. It was more than an hour before his nerves quieted down and permitted him to sleep. As a result he slept very late.

WHEN Toby went on deck it was to learn that the boat was below Bernicia. He wandered about intending to eat breakfast with his new friend, but Mr. Freeman's non-appearance and Toby's own appetite sent him to the table alone. As men began gathering their luggage to disembark Toby became vaguely uneasy. He could find neither Mr. Freeman, nor Quinlan and Rogers. He questioned the crew, and a deckhand told him:

"Three men quit the boat at Bernicia. Tall, thin, solemn looking cuss that's known as Sacramento Sam. Works the boats down from Sacramento. Short, stout feller called Fatty Dick, and an oldish cuss with rusty whiskers and warmed over blue eyes."

Toby drew aside and hurriedly opened the bag. He sighed with relief as he peeped in and glimpsed the gold. He gently essayed to shake out an once on the table and was horrified to behold mixed duckshot hopping and rolling to the floor. There was just enough gold in the bag to cover the shot at the opening.

"Damn them all!" he groaned. "I won't trust anybody in California after this."

His despair was followed by consuming anger. The evening's entertainment had cost a bit over twelve hundred dollars.

"The miserable old reprobate!" he raged. "Who'd ever thought of their stealing my money that way? I've been made a fool of twice within twenty-four hours. They'll be smart to fool me again."

Then he endeavored to plan a course of action. He assumed Freeman's talk about Calaveras County was all a lie. He had no idea just where he would go to press his luck.

On the wharf he bought a morning paper and scanned it eagerly. From the Calaveras district there were several worthwhile items. Men were finding gold. From San Andreas alone some twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of dust was being sent out each month. One claim at Murphy's had paid two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Considerable pay gravel had been reported as found near Big Tree Grove, and it was believed that the Big Blue Lead would be picked up there.

A review of all the Calaveras news forced Toby to admit that Freeman had spoken without exaggeration regarding conditions there. He was surprised to learn that there was a hotel at Big Tree Grove, which would open in another month. Mokelumne Hill seemed to be the center of stage lines and connected with Stockton. An advertisement informed him that the steamer *Julia*, six hundred tons, would leave at four o'clock that afternoon for Stockton, a distance of a hundred and twenty-seven miles, fare five dollars. He went to the post office and left directions for his mail to be forwarded to Mokelumne Hill.

CHAPTER II

TOBY TRAVELS

AFTER forty-five miles of stage travel from Stockton Toby Lang arrived at Mokelumne and discovered that it was not a hill at all but was in a flat, or basin, and surrounded by hills. He was greatly disappointed to learn that the shallow placers in the district had long since been taken up and that the majority of them were played out.

Making inquiries, he learned that there were hydraulic claims at Buckeye and

Buena Vista Hill, a few miles from town, but he knew nothing of hydraulic mining. He was offered his choice of several surface claims and might have bought of one if not for the warning of Sandel, proprietor of the eating house where he had secured lodgings. The diggings at Tunnel Ridge, a mile of way, were worked through tunnels and offered no field for the individual.

While eating his supper in Sandel's cabin, built of light lava, or tufa, he almost succumbed to discouragement. Had he had his three thousand dollars intact he probably would have engaged passage that night for a return to the east and the parson's daughter. As it was, he wrote her a brave letter and requested her to write in care of Sandel, and assured her he would soon have good news to announce. Then he gave way to homesickness for a bit. Sandel, a genial man—therefore undoubtedly a scoundrel, feared Toby—took advantage of a lull at his counter and casually inquired—

"Working in cap, Lang?"

"What?"

"The vein's pinched out?"

"I'm new to this country. I don't know what you mean. I haven't done any mining yet."

"I mean are you busted."

"No. I have some money. I came out to dig gold."

"Know anything about mining?"

"No."

"There's plenty of gold left if one can find it," mused the restaurant keeper. "I put in some years at it, but find this averages better—selling grub. The old placer days are passing. Quartz mining will be the thing in the future. Hydraulic mining is placer mining on a gigantic scale. If you'll ride from the Big Trees toward the Yosemite Valley, after you leave Murphy's, you'll find every rod of ground, almost, for miles and miles have have been dug up and turned over. All the way to the foothills it's the same. I was in it when the placer miner was king. Dig down twenty feet and pick it up. But I wouldn't stick to one claim. Always one twice as rich just around the corner. Until you get the hang of the thing and get your bearings you'd best try pocket mining. Exciting, and said to be healthful. After you get tired of that come back here and I'll give you a job at twenty dollars a week. You look clean. Hard to get help that looks clean."

THE INFORMATION was discouraging, as Toby had expected the easy profusion of gold which marked '49 and the early Fifties. But the man's attitude made him feel a bit better. Some one actually had offered to pay him money instead of trying to take it away from him. He thanked Sandel and added:

"I've written a letter back East and have given your place as my address. Is that all right?"

"Safest bet you ever made. I'll hold it, or forward it at your request, till hell freezes over."

This sounded heartsome. Toby asked—

"What's pocket mining, anyway?"

Sandel twindled his thumbs and cast about for an explanation which could be understood by a very green greenhorn. Then he said:

"We'll take West Point for example. It's between the north and south forks of the Mokelumne River, some twelve miles from here in a direct line, or sixteen by road. The lodes are narrow and rich, but the gold is found only in pockets as a rule. Mining and milling over there are separate occupations. Custom mills, as there isn't one vein in a dozen that'll keep a mill busy. If you go in for pocketing you'd better hire out to some one until you learn the game, then go in for yourself. You'd hunt for surface signs till you located a pocket. Then you'd dig down and clean it out. You might have to go down fifty feet. You'd pound out the coarsest gold in a hand mortar and send the rest to a custom mill. Then hunt for another, and so on. When you hit it you get lots of money quick. Most pocket miners live high after they make a strike; then live slim. But they seem to

have more money to spend than any other kind of miner in Calaveras County. We have a hundred men who do nothing else. A pocket must pay fifteen dollars to a ton to give the miner anything. The mining laws in the West Point district allow you two hundred feet on a claim, and you must do a day's work every month to hold it."

Toby brightened. He was eager to work.

"I'll get a job with some pocket miner and learn the game," he decided.

"How did you happen to come up here, anyway?" asked Sandel.

"Met a man on the boat from Sacramento who talked of hunting for the Big Blue Lead up near the Big Tree Grove. He gave his name as Elijah Freeman."

Sandel grinned and muttered—

"That old cuss!"

"Of course I now know he was lying, for he played a mean trick on me," said Toby.

"Played tricks? Of course he did. He'd play them on his poor old grandmother if he had one. But he does hang out over near Big Tree Grove, and I reckon he's hunted for the Big Blue Lead. Hard kind of a crowd got in there this spring. When the hotel opens they'll have to clear out."

Tony turned his head aside to conceal his disappointment. If a locality sounded favorable some toughs already were there to spoil it. Sandel left him, to wait on some customers.

Disappointment slowly gave way to anger. He left the cabin to take a look at the town in the evening. The streets were livening up as men swarmed in from the outside to take a chance at the gambling games and indulge in drinking bouts. In the first place he visited he risked five dollars on three card monte and then and there firmly resolved never to rely on his eyesight again while in California.

At the next saloon he paid two bits for a glass of beer and viewed the various gambling layouts with much aversion. While he was surveying the scene a man bumped into him. He good naturedly gave ground and thereby made a mistake. The newcomer, a slim, dapper Mexican, spotted him for a greenhorn and gave him a violent push. Toby's red hair seemed to bristle as he instantly swung on the man's chin and lifted him from the floor, and dropped him insensible on his back.

"Bully work, kid, but look out when he gits up," warned a bartender.

"He'll be slow getting up," said Toby, "and if he hasn't had enough I'll give him another."

"Have your gun ready then. Don't try him with a knife. He's all hell with a knife. He's Pasquel."

"I haven't either a knife or a revolver. I—"

"Out! Git out!" hissed the bartender, and the man on the floor began to stir.

Toby was seized by panicky fear, the fear of cold steel. When he quit running he was back in Sandel's restaurant. His abrupt entrance told the proprietor that something was wrong. The men eating at a table looked at him curiously. Sandel said:

"Step in back here. I put your bag under the bed."

Toby, breathing hard, followed him and made a feverish dive for the bag and had a gun out before Sandel could seize his wrist.

"Put that shooting iron back," whispered Sandel. "What's the matter with you? You've been running. From what?"

"Damned Mexican. He shoved me around. I lammed him one and knocked him cold," panted Toby.

"Good. But cool off. You don't need a gun for a greaser you've clipped on the jaw."

"I should have stayed," sighed Toby, "but a bartender jumped me off my feet. The man I punched is called Pasquel."

"Bad. You did well to run. Barkeep gave you good advice. Don't leave this room till the stagecoach comes along in the morning. I'll see you get an inside seat. That Pasquel is bad. And with a knife, throwing or plain carving — wow!"

"But a gun is quicker than a knife," sullenly insisted Toby.

"Not your gun against his knife," warned Sandel, "and he's no slouch with a six-shooter."

TOBY slept poorly and was up early. He did not go outside the restaurant. From a window he watched every man making for the place. He sat with his bag open beside him and one hand resting on a gun. He felt uneasy. He knew he could shoot as straight as any man he was likely to meet, but he never had shot at a living target. He believed the sensation of having killed even a ruffian would upset him terribly. Beneath this natural reluctance to resort to lethal weapons was the consuming anger at the Mexican's insolent abuse. During the night he had killed the man in his thoughts many times. Yet all the while he realized he might not be capable of pulling trigger and snuffing out a life even if he had the drop and believed himself to be in deadly peril. But the memory of the drive to the chin helped him some. It suggested at the least a stirring of the worm.

It was with great relief that he saw the stagecoach lumbering up to the restaurant. Pasquel was not in sight. He climbed inside and paid his passage, not to West Point but to Murphy's. Until clear of the town he kept his bag on his knees and unfastened.

The ride to Murphy's was uneventful. He noticed the discarded placers along the road. Some of these, turned inside out, were being grubbed over by Chinese. Murphy's was a stopping place for those going to, or arriving from, the Big Tree Grove. A month later, when the hotel had opened, it would be quite a lively place. He found he would have some time to wait before proceeding north, for his plan of action had been settled. He would endeavor to find Elijah Freeman and demand a settlement. The smashing blow on Pasquel's jaw was responsible for this bit of daring.

To kill time he visited a claim that had yielded a quarter of a million in gold and he was amazed to find it measured only a hundred by forty feet. A garrulous old man told him that fruit ripened two weeks later at Murphy's than it did at Douglas Flat only two miles below. He found good food in a small eating house. He kept an eye open for Mexicans; they all looked alike to him. He was glad when the journey was resumed.

He was the only passenger and, as he rode with the driver, he asked questions about the Grove. The driver eyed him askance and told him:

"Hotel ain't open yet. The nearest you can bed to the Grove is Kleg Curts' place. You know any one at Curts' place?"

"No. That is; I know Elijah Freeman if he lives near Curts."

The driver gave him a sidelong glance and asked—

"You aiming to find Lige?"

"Yes. I want to see him. Bit of business."

"That's different. He lives near Curts just inside the Big Grove. The hotel is several miles south. Lige hives up on the edge of the timber and near Curts' place where there's folks like him."

"Just what kind of folks are they?" asked Toby.

The driver laughed mockingly and answered:

"Oh, no, thank you. Not any for me. I'm just a low down stagecoach driver."

"Just what do you mean?" pressed Toby.

"Not a thing. I say it's a fine day. Let's talk about natur'. I love natur'. All I ask is that the coach is let alone after the season opens and folks go to the hotel. I never see, nor hear, anything that don't consarn me. I'll only say that you're young. That there's time yet."

"Time for what?" querulously demanded Toby.

"Time for mending your ways, Bub. But don't go and git het up. My whiskers are gray. I've seen many fire eaters come and go, and I've outlived all of them so far. It don't pay."

"You've mistaken me," said Toby.

"I'm always for peace. I'm too young to be very far gone on the wrong road."

"Yeah? So's Jim Dance young."

"Don't know him."

"Er-huh. You'll 'scuse me if I give my 'tention to my hosses, mister."

And from then on the driver refused to give any heed to his passenger until the stage came to a narrow plateau, well grassed and having for a background a stately fringe of trees measuring fifteen or more feet in diameter. A long log house suggested an inn. Beyond it were several small shacks. The driver halted his team and remarked:

"Long place is Curts'. I ain't got nothin' for him this trip and won't call. Old Lige Freeman usually hangs out at Curts'."

FOR AN hour before the stagecoach lumbered up the last rise to the plateau the long loghouse was the scene of a lively conference. Kleg Curts, proprietor of the crude hostelry, outlaw and killer, announced to his three companions:

"I'm for making a stab right away. Twenty-five thousand ain't to be sneezed at."

Gospel Jones, whose long, sanctimonious face was clean shaven, although he wore a ruff of Horace Greely whiskers under his chin, pulled a Bowie knife from his boot and commenced whittling a stick. As Jones was wise in his way and often prefaced some excellent bit of advice by whittling, the men waited for him to express himself. With the end of the stick sharpened to suit him, he lifted his head and said:

"But why work by piecemeal, Curts? We can't even do that. We can't pull that trick more'n once. Twenty-five thousand ain't to be sneezed at. But there's time when nearly double that is sent out. Pasquel can tell us when to strike. Why not be patient a bit longer and feather our nests right? What's twenty-five thousand divided among six of us? For you to close up this place, Curts, for a sixth of twenty-five thousand would leave you out of pocket."

Jim Dance, still in his teens, but with a thin lipped mouth suggesting the cruelty of an Apache, laughed in shrill derision.

Curts coldly demanded—

"Well, what's tickled your funnybone?"

With a wide grin, entirely lacking in amiability, Dance answered—

"I'm wondering who Gospel's leaving out when he talks of six shares."

"Now, Jim, don't git started with that nickering laff of yours," quietly advised Gospel Jones. "You know mighty well I'm leaving out Old Man Freeman, who goes capering off to play on his own hook. Powder Williams ain't much better, but he does come in handy in selling stuff we send down the ridge. And Powder is smart. If we forgot him he might act up nasty."

"And get his throat cut," growled Curts. "Gospel, you think some more. Freeman can be very useful when we have work that's suited for him to do."

"What's your idea, Boston?" asked Gospel.

The question was put politely, for Boston John, despite his nickname, his stovepipe hat and long black coat, was an exterminator of parts. He lacked Curts' finesse in planning raids. He entirely lacked Powder Williams' skill at all games. He had none of young Dance's insane rage. In various other ways he was lacking. But in one rôle he was quite preeminent. He could kill with marvelous celerity. With gun or knife he was deadly. His companions appreciated his ability along this line. They knew he was the only man whom Pasquel, an artsist with a knife, did not care to meet.

Kleg Curts, the leader, twisted the ends of his long mustaches and waited with no show of impatience while Boston John folded his hands in his lap and brooded thoughtfully. Clearing his throat with a little cough, he finally said:

"Elijah Freeman ain't worth a damn to any outfit. He can't be depended on to be on hand when wanted. Always off on some private rinktum. He ain't no good to any outfit of workers, but he's got a

master pretty granddaughter. You had her in mind, Curts, when you spoke a word for Elijah?"

None of the others would have dared to venture the query. Curts grimaced in an effort to smile and evaded the query by saying:

"Suppose we let that hand wait till the cards are dealt. If Elijah isn't on hand to take cards he doesn't share in the pot."

Young Dance viciously offered—

"I'll take the gal and you can split my share and give half to the old man."

"And I'll split your throat, you young devil, if you get in my path!" hoarsely warned Curts.

THE TWO stared at each other, round eyed, their faces drawn with sudden passion. Boston John watched them speculatively, like a connoisseur. He decided that if young Dance made a surprise attack he would win. With Curts on his guard he would lose. Gospel Jones fumbled his ruff of whiskers and played for peace by asking soothingly:

"Why should a mighty good outfit be busted up along of a young female? If she was a handsome young critter it would be different, but she is all eyes, and looks scared to death. Just a dead weight on any man who wants to git along in the world. If our outfit is to be busted up why not let the young woman wait till that happens and the survivors have something of a stake to live on?"

Boston John laughed raucously as the two men ceased eying each other.

"Gospel is right, as he usually is, the old humbug. Let's leave the young woman out of our talk till we've made a kill. What shall we do when people begin coming to the hotel over in the Grove? There'll be some fat pocketbooks among them." He smacked his lips.

Curts' eyes gleamed.

"If we can catch a parcel of them together at night we'll clean them out," he said.

"No witnesses," added young Dance. "They must be reported missing, with nary a sign of any of them ever found."

"What do you say, Gospel?" urged Boston John.

Gospel ran a finger along the keen edge of his long knife and slowly said:

"You won't like what I'm going to say; that is, Curts and Jim won't. But I've got lots of years atop of my head. I've learned things by watching how different games turn out. But this is what I say: Be polite as old pie to all them pilgrims. Never offer to touch a penny belonging to them. Never be seen hanging round the hotel. Be just simple, humble folks till we can strike a rich Easterner. One of the Central Pacific crowd, say. Then carry him back into the hills and hold him for a fat ransom. Live, rich Easterner's worth more to us than a dead one. If you'd planned on staying her another season, Curts, I'd say it would be foolish to bother any of them. We'd have to pick our man wisely, as we can't play that game but once. Curts would have to be here all the time, with some of the others popping in and out. The man's friends might offer a big reward. We might decide to have some of us find him and put up a mock battle. But we'll be wiser if we don't work any game up in this neck of the country."

"You might open a Sunday school," sneered Dance.

"Gospel's right," said Boston John.

Curts, accepted as leader so long as he owned the roadhouse, slowly nodded his head in acquiescence, and said:

"Then the San Andreas holdup seems to be the only job in sight just now. Any one got anything to say?"

Boston John rasped a thumb across his square chin and said:

"There's Pasquel. He's a mystery to us. He comes and plays a hand at our table and then is off on his own business. If he's raking in the coin he should divide with us. We give him a hiding place and protection. But he runs with us, then he runs alone. I've a notion he's making fat side money."

"We're rather depending on him to

know when the San Andreas job is ripe," reminded Curts.

With his little prefatory cough, Boston said:

"I'm not good at planning up things, but something Gospel said give me a notion. I said Gospel was right about us not troubling people visiting the Big Grove. But I'm wondering if there ain't a way to work and run no risk. A way that'll leave you free to keep on running this shebang. Say a rich Easterner was caught and taken to a safe place. Say a big reward was offered for him back safe and sound. Say Pasquel was left to guard him and the rest of us go to rescue him."

He paused. None guessed the dénouement of his plan, unless it was Jim Dance, who sat with elbows on his knees, leaning forward eagerly, his face distorted by a cruel grimace.

"Yes, yes," prompted Gospel Jones.

"Well, say Pasquel got accidentally killed when the prisoner was rescued," murmured Boston. "Wouldn't that give a fine color to the whole job and make folks think we couldn't have took part in stealing the man?"

"Damme, Boston, but you've got a head!" enthusiastically cried Curts. "Pasquel has been almost as much bother to us as he has been help."

"No man can live forever," added Boston.

"Sh-h!" hissed Gospel Jones, lifting a hand for silence. The stagecoach had arrived and left a passenger. "It's Pasquel! He can't have heard. But watch his face! Watch his face to make sure."

THEN the door opened and a stranger with fiery red hair stood on the threshold, blinking the sun glare from his blue eyes. The interior of the long room was much in the shadow. Toby Lang was the first to speak. He called out:

"Anybody at home. I can see some one, I think."

"My dear young man, there are several of us simple citizens here. Come in; come in," cordially invited Gospel Jones, as he slipped the Bowie knife back in his boot.

CHAPTER III

GETTING ACQUAINTED

TOBY LANG advanced and all but tripped over Jim Dance's legs.

"Well, Stumble Heels, where you think you're going? Keep your clumsy feet where they belong, or I'll cut your comb," cried Dance.

"Jim, Jim, you behave," said Gospel Jones soothingly.

Toby grinned and cheerfully said:

"Beg pardon, neighbor; but if you wouldn't sprawl out so you wouldn't get stepped on. No call for rough language."

Dance began a shrill, neighing laugh and came to his feet, his hand leaping to his belt. Boston John swore savagely and attempted to seize the young firebrand. Dance dodged the clutching hand and, with drawn knife, sprang toward Toby, who halted the assault by the simple expedient of tossing his leather bag toward the feet of his assailant. Dance's feet hit the bag and he fell flat and lost his knife. Toby picked up the knife and stabbed it deep into the front of the bar and snapped the blade. Then he recovered his bag and waited. It all happened in a few seconds.

Young Dance came slowly to his feet, his ferret eyes staring at the knife haft on the floor. Then he shifted his gaze to the smiling, red headed young man. Toby was the first to speak, saying:

"I'm not in any mood for fooling. I'm tired and hungry."

With an explosion of oaths Dance drew a gun and covered the newcomer. At one side sounded a low, apologetic cough; then Boston John was saying—

"You're within an inch of hell, young devil."

The staccato *click-click* of a gun being cocked stressed the warning. Without removing his gaze from Toby, Dance lowered his weapon and whined—

"John, some day I'll be the death of you."

"Shut up!" roared Curts. "Want this man to think we're a den of cutthroats? What's your handle, mister?"

Toby gave his name. Curts continued—"How do you happen to come here to Curtsville?"

"Stage coach."

Gospel Jones chuckled, although he knew the young man had not meant to be facetious. Toby quickly caught himself and explained:

"I guess you mean why did I come up here. I'm planning to take up pocket mining."

"A damn' guessing Yankee!" hissed Dance.

"You've lost a knife, Jim. You're trying my patience. Better let it go at that," warned Curts.

"There's no cause for a quarrel here," said Gospel Jones amiably, "either about the way a man talks, or because of the country he came from. His tongue is his own, and the Civil War is over."

"I never saw this man before. I don't know why he should try to pick on me," complained Toby. "I suppose I have as much right as any one to try pocket mining."

"You have every right that belongs to a white man," solemnly assured Gospel Jones. "Pocket mining is an ancient and honorable calling. If a man has big enough grub stake he oughter do well."

"Oh, I'm not broke by any means," said Toby.

BOSTON JOHN had heard something clink when the bag hit the floor. He shifted the angle of his stovepipe and stretched out his hands to feel of the bag, and said—

"Good work in that."

"My work," proudly said Toby. "I was apprenticed to a leatherworker back home for a bit, long enough to work with leather. I made these also."

He set the bag on the bar and opened it and lifted out the two .44's and drew them from their holsters. To his amazement boxes and stools went over as the company threw itself backward on the floor.

"Well, for goodness sake!" exclaimed Toby. "Haven't you folks ever seen revolvers before? You seem to be wearing enough of them not to be nervous. I was trying to show you the holsters I made. He stuffed the weapons back into the bag with the holsters.

Boston John righted his stool, sat down and removed his hat, and mopped his brow with a red handkerchief. He quietly advised—

"Never show off with guns unless you tell folks what you're up to."

Dance, now quite recovered from the shock of the suddenly appearing weapons, snickered in derision and remarked:

"Good place to have 'em in if you should be in a hurry. Why not keep them nailed up in a box? Then you'd always know just where to find 'em."

Toby knew this was sarcasm, but he accepted it good naturedly, and explained:

"I worked in the factory where these guns are made; or I'd never fetched them along. They sort of remind me of home and cheer me up when I feel lonesome."

"Well, I'll be cussed!" said Boston John: then, fiercely. "Sure you ain't up to some game?"

Toby shivered. His voice was bitter as he answered:

"I never want to see a card game again. Cost me thirteen hundred dollars the other night."

The four men exchanged glances. With his voice soft and soothing, Gospel Jones encouraged:

"Never stay licked. Git your money back from where you lost it. Or mebbe you're hogged out and ain't got a stake."

"Oh, no, I have a good stake; but if I don't play any more I'll be sure I won't be cleaned out."

Curts said:

"This is a free country, and you can do as you like so long as you don't tromple on other people's feet. Young Dance, there, is a bit hot tempered at times, but he means nothing bad." Toby's gaze

switched to the broken blade in the front of the bar. Curts continued, "Any of the boys will be glad to advise you about pocket mining. Mr. Jones has had much experience."

Young Dance was not completely subdued. Nor was he willing to play a waiting game as suggested by Curts' veiled speech. He stared defiantly at Toby and challenged:

"I'll shoot with you at a mark for a dollar a shot. That ain't playing cards."

"I can shoot a little, of course," Toby readily confessed, "but it wouldn't be quite fair."

"What do you mean, not fair?" snarled Dance.

"I mean, fair to you. I've practised quite a bit."

The silence which followed this explanation was broken by Gospel, who warmly approved, saying:

"Well, well, there's honesty for you! A deep well of honesty where all of us can drink and kill our thirsts. Now I'll wager a friendly dollar with you, Jim, that this young man can send a hunk of lead nearer a mark than you can."

"All right, if he doesn't dare back himself after all his loud talk."

CURTS, Boston John and Gospel were anxious to learn how well the tenderfoot could shoot. Dance desired only to save his pride by proving his superiority. Toby was a bit worried. Mr. Jones seemed to be a very kind, a very benevolent man. It did not seem right that he should risk a dollar on a stranger. Toby took it for ganted that all gun toting Western men were experts with firearms, else why should they carry them in their belts? To save the genial Mr. Jones from losing a wager he reluctantly said:

"Don't any of you bet on me. I'll back myself. I'll shoot for a dollar."

"Six shots for six dollars!" eagerly insisted Dance.

Toby had vowed he would not gamble again; yet shooting with his own guns was far different from being robbed at cards.

"All right. For six dollars," he agreed.

With a wild whoop, Dance leaped to his feet, flapped his arms against his sides, crowed like a rooster, and made for the door. The others, Toby without any enthusiasm, followed. Gospel Jones became master of ceremonies. Bare headed and with his gray hair streaming in the spring breeze, he produced a piece of wrapping paper, discarded it for a playing card, at Dance's insistence, and ran to a tree and made the target fast. Dance grinned and said—

"Looks a trifle small to you, mister?"

"It does look small at this distance."

"Yet I can split your heart at that distance," boasted Dance.

"All right. Go ahead and show what you can do, Mr. Dance. You challenged me," said Toby.

Dance drew his gun and, with a grin at his companions, threw it down and began shooting. Gospel Jones smiled surreptitiously as the rapid discharge, plus the youth's seeming indifference, left Lang very thoughtful. Dance wheeled to observe what effect his marksmanship had had on the stranger. But Toby was staring beyond the tree, where he had caught a glimpse of a slight figure in a brightly colored calico dress vanish behind a tree. He was wondering who she was. The stage driver had mentioned no young women.

"Going to sleep till after sundown?" queried Dance.

Toby blinked to clear his eyes and stared at the target. At the distance it looked as if three shots had hit it near the top.

"Fetch it in and put up a new card," he suggested. "Looks as you'd scored the top edge. You overshot a trifle at first. Probably because you were careless."

"Any shot of the six wouldn't 'a' missed a man's heart. If you'd been standing there any one of the shots would 'a' cooled your hash," said Dance.

"Of course, you scarcely could help hitting a man and giving him a mortal wound at that range," agreed Toby.

Dance took a fresh card and ran to the

tree and pegged it to the bark. With his back to the men he remained motionless for a few moments as if watching something among the trees. He took back his own target and said three shots had grazed the edge. Three had cut the edge.

"Pretty good shooting," said Toby, "but you'd done better if you'd taken more time. When you see you were nicking the edge you should have fired a trifle lower."

"If talking was shooting you'd be the best shot this side the Rockies," jeered Dance.

Toby drew a gun from the bag and stepped to one side, and fired his string so rapidly as to cause Boston John, a past master at gun play, to stare, pop eyed. Before their gaze the onlookers had seen the center of the card dissolve within the space of a few seconds. A frame of pasteboard and the two pegs remained.

JIM DANCE, overcome by amazement, rage and wounded pride, threw six dollars into the open bag and hurried into the saloon. Toby, busily cleaning his gun before replacing it, did not observe the quick, sharp, questioning glances exchanged by the three men. They left him to finish with his weapon, and as they walked toward the house Boston John from the corner of his mouth asked—

"Just what is his game?"

"He's a greenhorn; no doubt about it," said Gospel.

"But that's mighty prime shooting," insisted Boston; and he shifted the angle of his stovepipe and thrust out his under lip thoughtfully.

"Lots of men back East can shoot," said Gospel.

Curts was deeply puzzled, yet he decided:

"He's a greenhorn, all right. He couldn't play the part so true to life. He's it. It must be he learned to shoot where he was making the guns. I believe that."

"I don't know," muttered Boston. "Men have been put on my trail who would fool the devil. One, a peddler, almost got me."

"But if he'd come out here to notch his gun with your pelt, Boston, he wouldn't do any showing off," reasoned Gospel Jones. "And shooting at a playing card is mighty different from shooting at a target that can shoot back."

"Of course, of course," mumbled Boston, "but I'd like to see how he can shoot at a living target. He looks and acts as green as valley grass. But there wasn't anything green in the way he kept pumping the lead."

Curts caught his two companions by the arms and halted a short distance from the saloon door. In a whisper he suggested—

"Why not set up a living target for him."

"How?" demanded Boston. "Gospel spoke of a living target that can shoot back."

"Not so loud," murmured Curts, with a sidelong glance at the saloon. "There's Dance. He's gitting out of hand. More pernicketty every day. He's gitting to be a damn' nuisance. He's got the notion he's a prime killer."

"I'll wind up his ball of yarn mighty sudden one of these days," said Boston. "But why not stack Pasquel agin this young feller. Pasquel will work in a cold deck before he gets through with us."

"Dance is here. Pasquel isn't. Dance is aching to git at this young feller. Why shouldn't we turn him loose," urged Curts.

"If Jim cashes in it'll leave one less to share in the next big haul," mused Boston, "and I reckon you're right about waiting for Pasquel to give the word for the San Andreas job."

But Gospel Jones was a thoughtful man. He prided himself on looking all around every problem before endorsing it. He stayed his companions as they would have entered the saloon by saying:

"Wait a bit. We're forgetting the young man's hankering to buy a pocket mine."

"But if he has the price why don't we

take it without any waiting?" impatiently broke in Boston.

"John, John, when will you learn that the shortest way ain't always the best," gently rebuked Gospel. "If a man is keen to hand over his poke of dust and say 'Thank ye!' to the one who takes it, why kill him for it? It's gitting unsafer and unsafer to kill folks out here. Let's sell him a claim. Give him a bill of sale. Have it reg'lar. After that if Dance is keen to mount him, why, we can sit back 'n' watch the two go at it."

"Gospel's right," said Curts. "Time enough to use harsh measures when we have to. Gospel better be the one to sell him a claim."

"Very well," grumbled the killer. "But I've lived a long stretch out here and I've got what I went after. I've done it by being direct, without bothering with any fiddle-faddle."

"Times are changing; have changed," murmured Gospel. "Think of the rare boys who have gone up a tree, and t'others who raced into Arizona. My motto is: Deal from the top when you can; from the bottom only when you have to."

"What's he up to now?" sharply asked Curts.

His companions turned and saw Toby walking into a small grove of the big trees.

"Sha'n't I fetch him back?" asked Boston.

"He won't go far," said Gospel assuringly. "He'll come back for victuals and a bed. He's green and wants a close look at the trees. We mustn't let him think we're watching him. We'll go inside. Jim will be having ugly notions if we keep away from him much longer."

IT WAS not the big trees that lured Toby into the grove. Rather, he was remembering the flash of a bright calico dress vanishing behind a huge bole. As he strolled among the giants he whistled "Listen to the Mocking Bird" and fancied he did well with the melody. He abruptly ceased whistling to listen in amazement as a mocking bird joined in and made his own efforts poor and crude. What was quite astounding was the undeniable fact that the beautiful songster knew the tune and whistled it through from start to finish.

Toby stole around a huge tree and saw a flash of bright calico. He wheeled smartly and took the opposite direction and all but collided with the quaintest creature he ever had seen. She looked more like a woods elf than a girl. Her expression was at variance with her brightly checked dress. She should have been brilliant with smiles and laughter. At first she impressed him with being all eyes and these were large and dark and somber. Some emotion had touched her brown cheeks with a bit of crimson, but the small face was very sad. Her simple dress of a gay checked pattern had been recently ironed, but it was faded and worn. Her shoes were run over. Her dark hair was drawn tightly back and tied at her neck with a faded ribbon. Her face was expressionless as she stood there and stared at him.

He remembered his manners and removed his hat, and saw her gaze dart upward to his fiery hair. He blushed, for his hair always annoyed him.

"You're wonderful," he awkwardly told her. "I'd have taken my oath it was a mocking bird. I thought I was some whistler, but I'm not one-two alongside of you. Live near here?"

"Back a mile," she replied in a colorless voice. "You belong to Curts' outfit?"

"No. I don't seem to belong anywhere. I'm from the East."

"A tenderfoot," she murmured, and now her gaze quickened. "Walk along with me. We're too near Curts' place. Tell me about yourself. Who are you? What are you here for? I'm starved for talk from some one who is honest. You're honest?"

His face grew warm under her searching gaze.

"Honest, no doubt, miss; and respectable, I hope."

He too was starved to talk with some

one honest, and as they slowly strolled among the big trees it seemed natural for him to give his life history, even to dwelling fondly on the parson's daughter. When he had quite run down she passionately cried:

"How could you do it? How could you leave all that happiness and come out here? You had honest work. You had saved money. You were somebody. You had friends. You had some one to like, some one who likes you. You left all that for this!" And she threw out her hands and gloomily stared at some of the grandest trees ever found on earth.

He rubbed his nose reflectively and replied honestly:

"I don't know why I left home and came out here. I wasn't dissatisfied with my work. I liked it. But it seemed as if something was pushing me against my will. I felt mighty sorry when the day came for me to leave. Perhaps it was pride that held me to my plan. But I've felt sorry ever since."

"You wouldn't tell that to a man," she said shrewdly. "You'd be ashamed. That shows how foolish a man can be. But why don't you go back? In cap?"

"Meaning broke? No. But I can't go back and be laughed at and have folks say I was licked."

"You're a coward," she quietly decided.

"You're a very outspoken young lady," he replied warmly.

"You're red headed. That means you're conceited and hot tempered."

"You're the one who's hot tempered," he countered. "I try to be friendly and you talk disagreeably."

Then he surrendered and confessed—

"God knows it seems good to talk with some one who isn't trying to cheat me, or bully me."

Her eyes lost their stormy expression. She pursed her red lips, nodded understandingly, and said:

"Yes, you must be starved. I thought you were just talking. Still you've been to Curts' place."

"To eat and get a bed. I never saw anything of any of them before."

THEN with a flash of indignation he told how young Dance had drawn a knife on him. He changed to laughing pride as he described how he had met that attack. She did not seem to be impressed. She signed and stared to one side. He insisted—

"You see I outsmarted him at his own game; and I beat him at shooting."

She wheeled and stared at him and whispered:

"Dance is deadly. He's waiting his time."

He laughed, but felt no mirth.

"They're all pretty tough," he admitted. "That Boston John is a cold blooded old bird."

"Dance is more deadly than Boston John. He will kill when there's no profit in it."

"He's an uppity young fool with a twisted mind. If he bothers me I'll give him his needings."

She shook her head slowly, and reminded—

"You never can tell what notion a twisted mind will take, but they are all bad."

"Curts runs a saloon and eating place. Many men do that who are not bad," he insisted.

She compressed her lips convulsively, as if smothering speech. Then the impulse conquered her and she was urging:

"You go away. If you've left any belongings at the saloon don't call for it. I'll put you on a trail that'll take you down the ridge to Murphy's. Don't follow the stage road. But you go. Now."

His jaw crept forward and his blue eyes scowled as he growled:

"I'll not be crowded out like that. I'm sorry now I came here. Stage driver wanted to tell me things, but didn't dare to. But I'm here. And once a man starts leaving places to escape trouble he'll be kept on the run all his life."

"Oh, you don't understand," she cried. "It isn't as if you had any chance. And I don't dare speak any plainer."

"I've been cheated and bamboozled ever since I came to California," he hotly

told her. "I'm staying here to save my self-respect. I ran away once, like a fool. From Sacramento. Never again. If it comes to trouble I've got two guns and can use them."

"Oh, don't, don't!" she pleaded. "It's so hopeless to make you understand."

"All right, I won't. We'll talk about something else. What's your name?"

"Freeman. Helen Freeman."

The coincidence made him wince, and wish it had been some other name, although he knew Freemans in the East, all decent law abiding people.

"I live in back with my uncle, Elijah Freeman," she added.

Toby swallowed a bit and mopped his face furiously and managed to murmur:

"I see. Elijah. Fine old Bible name."

"Just the two of us. It's lonely up here with no other woman nearer than Murphy's. I'll work in the hotel when it opens. That'll be better."

"It must be lonely. None of your sex to keep you company, of course. And your uncle is at home?"

She shook, her head.

"I'm expecting him every day now. I came this far to see if he had arrived, but he wasn't on the stage."

"Then you've been here ever since the stage came along."

She nodded and said:

"I think it was your hair. At first I thought your head was on fire."

He reddened and glanced at her suspiciously, and complained—

"I can't tell if you're making fun of me or are just a child."

Her lips formed the first smile he had seen on her small face. The smile was very transient but it revealed to Toby an entirely different woman.

"I never make fun of folks," she said. "I've had too much hard luck to do that. And I am twenty years old. Goodby."

"Wait, please," he pleaded. "Can't I see you again soon?"

"I don't think so. The men at the saloon know I'll shoot the first one who comes near our cabin while my uncle's away. And you'll be taking the down stage tomorrow, if you're foolish enough to wait that long. You've had all the luck, and are tossing it away."

She was gone, running swiftly in and out among the giant trees, before he could voice any further remonstrance. He walked back to the saloon quite convinced that Elijah Freeman's niece was a queer stick, but very interesting. He didn't know whether he wanted to see her or not. He knew the parson's daughter would consider her more than queer, especially because of her frankness in speech.

CHAPTER IV

TWICE SALTED

CURTS' outfit followed its program of indifference, and Toby Lang was practically ignored when he entered the saloon. His status, apparently, was that of a transient guest. Jim Dance's eyes glittered lustfully as he gave the young man a sidelong glance, but he had heeded the voice of authority. Gospel Jones was the only one to have any conversation with Toby. That was after supper when the others were playing poker in the back room.

Gospel's flaccid face beamed with benevolence. His voice was low and kindly as he advised:

"Don't jump at a claim as if you were going to bite it. Look it over. Never act like you was in a hurry. Chances are you can find gold up here almost anywhere. But you don't want to waste time pannin' by guess 'n' by damn! Get a claim that's been worked a bit and then dropped by some fool who's always hunting for ounce diggings. Try it out. If you find good color, buy. If the owner won't let you try it out for indications, don't touch it."

"Any abandoned claims near here?"

"There's a lot of old claims that don't amount to a hoot. Chinaman couldn't live off'n some of them. Perhaps one of the most likely prospects is one Boston John owns. It's a scant two miles above here. He wouldn't work it for all the gold in Frisco mint. He never worked it

enough to test it out. Look at it. Make him let you dig into it. If the color shows good it's as likely a gamble as any you'll strike. They're all gambles."

"How much would he want for it?"

"All he can get. But if it looks good, offer him a thousand."

"If it looks good he won't sell," said Toby.

"First thing you want to do is to take an option. Pay something down before you touch it. Say fifty dollars. The option to bind your offer of a thousand. Make your bargain before you do any digging. Draw up a writing, showing you've paid option money, and the price you'll pay in full if it suits."

"I'm much obliged to you for your advice," said Toby. "I would have expected you to advise Boston instead of me."

"Boston's ways ain't my ways," gravely said Gospel. "I don't think much of his liking gun play ahead of everything else. I've found that peace pays better."

"But what's to stop him backing out of his bargain?" dubiously asked Toby.

"Oh, no, no," said Gospel with some vehemence. "He'd never buck against the mining code of all California. When he goes in for gun play he wants to get a man who's boasted being better'n him. He'd never pick on a tenderfoot. Nothing like that."

LANG retired early to his bunk and slept soundly until after daybreak. After breakfast he spoke to Boston John about his claim, explaining that Gospel had advised him to look at it. The two talked prices and finally settled on a thousand dollars, with fifty down to secure the option. Then Toby put their agreement in writing and Boston John scrawled his signature and Gospel and Curts witnessed it. After breakfast Boston and Jim Dance rode into the big trees, with the understanding that Toby, conducted by Gospel Jones, should meet them at the claim.

Boston John warned his companion:

"You keep out of sight. I'll do the talking."

"Why should you do the talking? I'm sort of hankering to do some talking," sharply replied Dance.

The killer stared at him malevolently, and so impelling was his gaze that the youth's eyes shifted uneasily. Boston calmly told him:

"I'm 'fraid it's coming to a show-down, Jim. I'm 'fraid I've got to cut off your young life."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Maybe I can do some cutting off." His tone lacked its usual assurance.

"No," replied Boston firmly. "You're too wild'n' crazy in your ways to git anywhere as a killer. Too hot blooded. So you'll stay back while I talk with the girl. We're going to the Freeman shack to git a stuffed snakeskin. Not for any of your lovemaking. After we've got the stuffed skin, and this mining deal is settled, you can do what you please."

"I never 'lowed I was goin' to pester the girl this mornin'," sullenly surrendered Dance, "but this 'I'm a better man than you be' stuff is gittin' on my nerves."

"That can wait till we've cleaned out the tenderfoot. None of us want to scare him out of the game by gun shootin'. And we've got to work smart and have everything finished before old Freeman and Pasquel pull in to git their fingers in the pie. By our rules they can't share unless they're on the ground."

"I know the rules. Go ahead and stop talking," grumbled Dance.

The two horsemen drew rein a short distance from the Freeman cabin. Boston said:

"Stay here till I've finished my errand. After that there's nothing to stop you paying a call. I'm against you bothering her. Old Freeman will turn vicious. But I don't try to boss any man's life."

"Bah! That old sheep. Play your cards, or git out of the game."

Suppressing a lust to annihilate the young desperado on the spot, Boston rode ahead and halted ten feet from the cabin.

Immediately the girl appeared at a window, a long revolver in one hand. She ordered sharply—

"You, Boston, vamoose!"

He threw up his hands, smiled grimly and said:

"Softly, softly, little woman. You won't kill a neighbor who rides up to borrow something."

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Only the stuffed rattler."

She was suspicious but could discover no hidden purpose. The door was barred. She could use the big gun her slim hand was gripping.

"You can have the ugly thing and keep it. I'll pass it through the window."

The stuffed skin of the reptile was tossed through the window from the end of a brush broom. Boston dismounted and picked it up and gained the saddle without saying a word. Riding among the trees, he told Dance:

"I'm going up to the claim. If you're wise you'll come along with me. That's good advice."

"I don't have to take no advice from nobody," curtly replied Dance. "I'll ride back to the saloon from here."

"Very well. I've told you the wise thing to do. If you get to the saloon before Curts leaves tell him to be careful in loading the gun. Not to make it too coarse and to use a strong charge of powder."

He rode on to the northeast.

DANCE waited until Boston was out of sight and then he dismounted and made for the cabin, whistling shrilly. The Freeman girl promptly appeared at the window, gun in hand. Dance waved a greeting and said—

"Reckoned I'd come over and see if you didn't need some wood chopped."

The long barrel of the .44 slithered across the windowsill and the girl ordered—

"*Vamos, pronto!*"

Dance laughed and, without lessening his stride, told her:

"Oh, you'd never shoot that gun at me. You'd never kill a young man in cold blood."

He scarcely had finished before the gun roared, and with a howl of rage and fear the youth leaped back, screaming:

"Damn you! You most hit me!"

The girl fired again and Dance believed the bullet creased his head. He turned and ran to the shelter of the trees, leaping from side to side and yelling horrible threats. Mounting his horse, he rode at a mad gallop back to the saloon. He slowed his pace on beholding a strange horse hitched to the rack. The animal, a big black, was a beauty, and Dance loved good horseflesh. He hurried inside and was greeted cordially by Elijah Freeman, who had the place to himself and was pouring a drink at the bar.

"Big black your hoss, Elijah?" asked Dance.

"A stray I picked up down near Murphy's. I mailed a letter to a San Francisco paper, describing the animal and stating he could be had if sent for and if property was proven."

"What a lot of fool bother," said Dance.

Freeman patted the bar with his hand for a bit and laughed silently. Then he explained:

"I did that as that's the right way. That's what I call playing the game right. Here I am with a prime hoss. No vigilant committee can come around to bother me with a noose. You, Jim, would just 'a' took the critter and rode off. But I've got a head. I send in a notice of stray being picked up. The man who lost the critter will never see the notice. But if he turns up 'n' gits to fussing and saying the hoss was stolen, there's my notice. A perfect alibi of my innocence."

"I LIKE short cuts," said Dance. "I'll play my hoss and a hundred, to boot, against the black. Best two hands out of three at poker. Just draw cards and showdown."

"No, no, Jim," amiably refused Freeman. "I'm holding that stray in trust for the rightful owner. He's honest come by

and I won't gamble him away. Where's the boys?"

"Gone out to sell a tenderfoot the claim Boston opened up while hiding out from a posse last year," grumbled Dance.

"Not that measly hole he dug northeast of my cabin?"

Dance grinned and nodded. Freeman laughed silently and wiped tears from his eyes. He insisted:

"But not even a tenderfoot would buy that hole without prospecting it. If he did that, even if he's blind, he'd know it wan't no good."

"He's free to prospect it. Gospel told him to do that. And he'll find color. Let's ride up and see how it's done."

"Salted, of course, but even the greenest greenhorn would know—"

"He won't know nothin'," cut in Dance. "Come along, or you'll miss lots of fun."

"I'll go, but I ought to be gitting back to the little girl."

"She's all right. I was over by there with Boston this morning. She fired two shots at me from a window," said Dance.

Freeman's blue eyes grew frosty, but his smile was genial as he warned:

"She can hit as well as shoot. She'll do both if you bother her."

Dance's eyes blazed with fury. With a hand on his gun, he hissed:

"Old man, I can't kill a woman. But I can kill you!"

"And what would that fetch you, Jim?" calmly asked Freeman. "A ride down into Mexico if you was lucky. A bosom full of lead if any of the boys could catch up with you. And your last trip to Mexico is still fondly remembered down there. They're hoping you'll come again. Be sensible and take your profits. You'll live longer. Well, as I won't be expected by the little woman till the stage comes I might as well ride up and watch the fun."

Dance was in an unusually vicious mood, and yet the old man's words sank deep. As an asylum Mexico was closed to him. He went outside, mounted and galloped off. The big black quickly overhauled him. His twisted nature began to crave the noble animal almost as much as it had lusted for the woman.

The scant two miles were soon covered and the men arrived before Toby began his examination of the property. A shallow trench had been commenced near the west line and several test holes had been started, but carried to no depth. Close by was the small shack which had sheltered Boston John during his period of hiding from the law.

AS FREEMAN reined in and beheld Toby and recognized him by his fiery hair, his face fell for a moment. The young man was standing with his back to Freeman, and the old man had time to regain his composure. Sliding from the saddle, he hurried forward and clapped a hand on Toby's shoulder and cried warmly:

"My young friend on the Sacramento boat! But why did you land at Benicia? I chased after you but couldn't find you. Well, well, gentlemen, an old acquaintance of mine."

Toby's blue eyes blazed as he confronted the old cheat. Then he was glimpsing the bright flutter of the red checked calico dress among the trees. He swallowed his wrath for the time being and stiffly acknowledged the greeting. With the men watching them curiously, Freeman lowered his voice and said:

"You don't know how pleased I be. When you have time you fetch out my dust and we'll settle."

"Settle!" exclaimed Toby. "Duckshot."

"No, no, bead gold. It occurs in the ancient river beds in several places in these hills and mountains."

"It was duckshot to me and I threw it away," sullenly said Toby.

The men were exchanging glances, asking questions with their eyes. Freeman, with a fine simulation of sorrow, shook his head slowly and fell back.

Boston John, anxious to be forward with his swindle, scowled at Dance, who was grinning broadly, and said:

"I don't know mines. I ain't interest in

them. I'm told this must be close to the Big Blue Lead. If it was filled with diamonds I wouldn't work it. My wants are few."

"Man for breakfast," said Dance.

"Half a man when I can't git one full sized," warned Boston. "You have your option, Mr. Lang. Go ahead and dig."

Curts, who had set forth ostensibly to shoot some mountain quail, loitered close by, his shotgun under his arm. Gospel Jones said to Boston—

"The price of your claim includes the shack, of course."

"It ain't so writ down, but I'll agree to that," said Boston.

TOBY was not so green that he failed to realize that he was surrounded by worthless men. Nor so verdant that he did not know that mines often were salted. He told Boston:

"I won't dig in any of these places where you have dug. I'll break new ground."

"Dig where you want to," grumbled Boston. "I dug a little but didn't bother to pan the dirt. I'll never dig in the ground. But if you don't want it I'll spend the option money hiring Mexicans to dig it up."

"You'd never work it, John. It's no good to you," said Gospel soothingly. "You've made fifty dollars just by coming up here. If my young friend finds pay dirt you've made a thousand. Easy money I call it."

"I ain't fussing," said Boston. "It's his to dig where he will."

Gospel Jones whispered over Toby's shoulder, advising him to try the ground on the south line as the soil had not been disturbed there. Toby threw off his hat and coat and with pick and shovel advanced toward the south end of the claim. Curts yelled wildly, elbowed him violently to one side and leaped in front of him and discharged the shotgun at something ahead. With a hoarse whoop, Gospel Jones ran forward and picked up the stuffed snake by the tail, and with a rare exhibition of repugnance ran to one side and cast it among the rocks.

Toby was shocked by the discovery of such a tenant. He hesitated and carefully examined the ground. Gospel cried:

"Never see the beat of it! Never see a rattler up this high before. You had a quick eye, Curts. You bagged him most mortal."

"Glad I happened to stop and happened to see him crawling along," said Curts. "But there's no money in this for me and I'll be going along. Wishing you good luck, Lang."

As he strode away Freeman ran after him and demanded hoarsely—

"Wa'n't that my old stuffed snake?"

"Shut up! Yes, I took care not to hit it."

"Good shooting. But the snake comes in for a share of the pot. Remember."

With this reminder Freeman returned to the group and announced that he was going home.

Toby stared after him as he rode into the timber and again was rewarded by sighting the girl for a moment. Then he advanced to near the spot where he had seen the snake. He attacked the soil. Almost at the outset he observed specks of gold. He found it a few inches under the top soil. Sizeable bits occurred deeper. Gospel Jones came with a bucket of water from a spring and washed out a panful.

"Judas priest!" he cried. "A hundred colors! That pan's worth fifty cents! And he ain't scratched it yet!"

"If that's the case I reckon I'd better turn back the fifty and hire men to work it," said Boston John in a rasping voice.

"Not if Lang wants to buy," stoutly said Gospel. "You know me, Boston. A lover of peace, but as firm as the rock of ages when any one bumps into me."

"I'll take the claim and move into the cabin," spoke up Toby. "No need of my returning to Curts' place, as I've fetched my bag along. If one of you will take back the horse he loaned me I'll be much obliged. Tell him I'll drop down and talk horses with him in a day or so. I think I shall need one."

Gospel Jones beamed upon him, patted his shoulder and said:

"I feel you made a lucky move when you come up here. If you don't want to buy a hoss Curts will let you hire one. Now I'll be going back and leave you to the pleasing job of shoveling out the purchase price before we can make the saloon. This claim's rich as spatter with gold."

With a gentle cough Boston John reminded:

"I'll be going with you, Gospel, as soon as the claim's been paid for. I shouldn't have priced it so low."

Toby, busy with fishing out nine hundred and fifty dollars from his bag, did not see the grim smile on the killer's face, nor the open delight and scorn now distorting Dance's narrow features.

"There you are," he said, rising and counting out the price in double eagles. "Probably I shall take time off to come down for supplies before night."

They were impatient to leave him as Toby was to have them go. Once he was alone he started working with pick and shovel to dig down to what he hoped would be the Big Blue Lead, failing that, a fat pocket. He labored half an hour and realized that he was finding no golden specks so plentiful as where the snake had been killed. He returned to that spot and carefully scraped up several pans of dirt and was making a sorry job of washing it when he became conscious of some one standing behind him.

HE STRAIGHTENED and turned and beheld the Freeman girl. The expression of her eyes impressed him as being more sad and mournful than ever. She spoke first, saying—

"So they fooled you."

"I don't know that," he replied stoutly, but with a curious sinking sensation around the heart. "Pretty rich color just around here."

She shook her head slowly, darted her finger at different portions of the claim and asked—

"But what about that place, and that, and that?"

"I've found color only where I'm digging," he confessed. "Why do you think I won't find much?"

"My uncle came home laughing. I got him to talking. When he laughs he's had the best of a deal. I'm ashamed to say it, but he's very tricky and you must never have anything to do with him."

Toby made a wry face. She continued—

"They killed a snake before you began panning any dirt?"

"Yes. Your uncle told you that," he replied moodily.

"It was a stuffed snakeskin. The gun was loaded with gold dust instead of shot. They salted the claim right before your eyes."

For nearly a minute he stood rigid and silent. Then he whispered:

"Damn them all! They've taken about everything except my clothes."

She pitied him for his ignorance. She pitied him for his hard luck. And she pitied him because she had found him strangely likable. "Of course," she encouraged, there may be a pay streak through this hunk of ground. Start digging a ditch across it. You pick and I'll shovel."

He waved her back and insisted—

"No work for a young lady."

Her cheeks took on the color of the bright checks in her skirt. She never had been so courteously addressed before. From occasional stray copies of *Godey's Lady's Book* she had learned how infinitely removed she was from the plane of a "lady". But she humored him and sat down; with worried brows she watched him dig his shallow trench. He worked stubbornly, driving the pick viciously into the earth. As he advanced she rose and examined the loose dirt behind him.

"I'd rest. You can't expect to do it all in a day," she said.

"I'll keep on till satisfied it's another swindle," he replied wrathfully.

He swung his pick with all his might and felt it strike something, penetrate something and then stop. He rested a bit and commented on the general cussedness

of California. He freed his pick with a bit of effort and after another blow he told her:

"Something's blocking me."

Discarding the pick, he took to shoveling.

She glanced around the terrain and said:

"It can't be a ledge. This spot is a little basin. Rains have washed in dirt and filled it up. Any gold that's in it must be down on the ledge. That may be fifty feet."

"It's no ledge. It isn't a rock," he muttered as he cleared away the dirt. "But the pick busted through something." A few more shovelfuls of dirt and he was exclaiming, "See it! See it! It's a box made of rawhide!"

She kneeled and scooped back the loose earth with her hands until the end of the box was fully revealed. He motioned for her to stand back and give him more room. He worked feverishly until the box was fully exposed. It was three feet long, about a foot and a half wide and five inches deep. When he lifted it clear of the ground he was amazed to find how heavy it was.

"Full of lead," he muttered.

She gave a little squeal of amazement and pointed to where the bottom of the box had given at one end. Several dull yellow discs protruded through this opening. He would have cut the rawhide fastenings, but she halted him with a little gesture of secrecy. She stood and surveyed the country to the south. Then she advised—

"Get it into the cabin—quick!"

He carried the box into the cabin. she walking behind him and picking up the yellow discs that escaped. After he had placed the box on the earth floor of the shack she whispered:

"Do you know what you've found? Gold! Fifty dollar pieces that Moffat and Company coined before the mint came to Frisco."

"Doggone!" he mumbled, scarcely able to believe his eyes as he opened the lid and stared down on the tiers and tiers of the old time forerunner of the double eagle in California. "Doggone if I can understand it," he muttered.

"It's yours," she whispered. "They meant to fool you and they've fooled themselves."

HE RAN his fingers over the tiers and after a hurried estimate he hoarsely whispered. "Great Scot, little lady! There's a round twenty-five thousand dollars in this mess, if they are real gold."

She scraped one with a case knife, although that test was not necessary. She had seen considerable of the private coinage of the State. She explained how they were accepted in lieu of National currency prior to the coming of the branch mint. Then she frightened him by weeping softly.

"What is it? Don't cry."

"It's because I'm glad for you, and am sorry for you," she sobbed.

"Sorry I've stumbled on to a fortune?" he gasped.

"Oh, so sorry, if the men at Curts' place find it out! For that will mean your death."

He denied that possibility, speaking confidently at first. Then he became silent as the saturnine face of Boston John, the vicious features of Jim Dance and the lowering countenance of Curts passed in review before his inner gaze. He knew that either of the trio—he was not yet sure of Gospel Jones—would cut his throat for one gold piece. And he, like the girl, became fearfully afraid.

"I'll bury them here in the cabin," he whispered. "Now. Let's do it now!"

"You get a hold on your nerves," she murmured as she scanned the hard packed floor. With a shake of her head she decided:

"You can't hide anything here without leaving signs. We must think better than that."

"Outdoors somewhere. I'll get them out of here quick," he panted.

She stayed him with a hand on his arm and pondered a bit. She advised:

"You'll have to take them out and put them in stout bags. This leather's almost ready to fall apart. We must find a safe place for them until I can get you some bags. I'll go to the cabin and fetch some that won't be missed. You be outside so they won't come into the cabin. Just throw your traps over your bonanza."

"Here's one stout bag!" he cried.

He emptied his leather bag and found that it would hold the greater part of the gold and leave room for his shirts on top. He strapped on his belt and two revolvers and shoved the remaining coins under the bunk and left the bag in one corner.

"Don't wear those guns," she warned. "They're two invitations to fight."

"I'll wear them and use them, even if I get killed," he doggedly declared.

"Go back to work. Put the guns aside. I'll fetch some bags. Our cabin's within a quarter of a mile."

She was out the door and running like a deer among the big trees. He hung his belt of weapons at the end of the cabin and returned to the claim.

When the girl returned she found him leaning limply against the side of the cabin with his guns belted on once more. She brought several stout buckskin bags.

"They'll more'n hold the stuff," she told him. "We can take some out of your leather bag."

He shook his head slowly. So peculiar was his facial expression that she feared he had lost his senses.

"What's the matter with you? Have you worked too hard? Wake up! See! These are stout bags and very big."

"They're fine as far as they go," he slowly told her, "but while you were gone I dug up another box. The total count is a round fifty thousand dollars! If I get that down to Frisco I will have earned it. And you shall have a fat slice for helping me."

"It's yours. I'll not touch a dollar!"

"I've thought it all out. You'll take fifteen thousand dollars for your help and advice and, above all, your good will. Then you won't have to stay cooped up on this ridge and starve. You can but pretty things. You can have a chance. Don't say anything. It's settled. But who'd 'a' thought their cheating game would fetch me a fortune! Now I can go home."

She stared at him pityingly. Tears slowly filled her eyes as she moaned:

"Oh, I'm afraid. Good Lord, I'm afraid. I'm afraid they've brought you death. Death, most surely if Curts and his men catch sight of them. My uncle's down there now. That means he'll be gone till late, if not all night. Our cabin has a pole floor. If you'll trust me we can poke this stuff under the floor from the back of the house. I've thought it all out. They'd never look for it there."

Toby stared at her thoughtfully for a full minute. He did not require a second to make up his mind, but he was finding something very pleasant and soothing in her wistful brown eyes.

"Yes, I'd trust you anywhere, with anything," he told her. "We'll make for the cabin. It'll take two trips."

"One trip to get it into the timber," she insisted. "I am stronger than you think. This is too open. They may come any time."

"If they do I'll shoot at sight."

"And get killed in your tracks!"

"No, not if I get the first whack. Believe it or not, but I can shoot."

CHAPTER V

TWO FOR THE LONG TRAIL

TOBY found Curts at the bar alone, the others being busy with cards in the back room. Toby expressed his thanks for the use of the horse and said—

"I'd like to buy him, or one as good."

"Hard work to find you another as good. But he's yours for three hundred dollars. And that's dirt cheap."

"Draw up a bill of sale while I dig up the price."

Curts began writing, but paused to comment:

"You're wearing two guns. A two gun man's seldom seen. What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I worked where these guns are made. Fetched along a brace to keep me from being homesick. This is the easiest way to carry them and keep track of them."

"When a man buys a good hoss and wears two guns he usually goes riding," said Curts.

"My riding will consist of coming here and going back to my claim. I shall want some grub to take back."

"I have it to sell. How's the claim look?"

Toby confessed dubiously:

"I don't know. I mean I know so little about mining I can't answer intelligently. But there must be gold there with the rich surface indications. I'm going down till I strike rock. Hope to find a big pocket."

"I think you will," gravely encouraged Curts. "Gold's found about everywhere around here."

He finished the bill of sale and signed it with a flourish just as the stage from Murphy's drove up to the door. The driver entered and called for a drink and eyed Toby curiously. He was remembering his veiled warning against the nature of the resort. Now he was beholding his late passenger wearing two guns. He bolted his liquor, anxious to leave, and produced a letter and thrust it into Toby's hand, saying:

"Sandel, Mokelume Hill, forwards this. Two bits."

Toby glanced at the letter and threw down the money and cried—

"I'll give four bits for every one you fetch me."

There was no mistaking the prim, precise writing of the parson's daughter. It made him feel sick for home. It filled him with elation to think how quickly he had realized his dreams of riches and soon could be returning East, to Hartford, to the cool front room of the parsonage, where the shades were kept drawn to prevent the sun from fading the staid carpet. He could see the stiff, slippery haircloth furniture and the center table topped with marble and the hair wreath under glass. More than once the parson's wife had enumerated the relatives who had contributed the material.

As it would be sacrilege to read the letter under Curts' roof he hurried forth and wandered some distance back of the house. To prolong anticipation he seated himself comfortably and stared at the letter. At last he gently opened it and was surprised and hurt to find it was a very short letter.

> . . . and, so, seeing you were bound to press your foolish quest I have felt free to break the engagement. To save us both further embarrassment, and to discourage any misunderstanding, I will say I am favorably impressed with the courteous attentions of Mr. Phineas Horn, of the Horn Shoe Company. Now that you have selected the Far West for your home I will wish you all happiness and prosperity.

TOBY was stupefied by this sentence so precisely imposed. For several minutes he stared up at the Sierra and endeavored to realize just what it all meant to him. He slowly tore the letter into tiny pieces and allowed the breezes to sift them over the hard earth. The obituary of his hopes and ambitions was summed up tersely in a phrase he had picked up since reaching California.

"Cold decked."

Reaction set in and he jumped to his feet. The quick shift in the girl's affections hurt his pride. She had written the letter before he had reached the Coast. She must have contemplated the move before he had kissed her goodby in the front room of mortuary atmosphere.

There was no suggestion of a treasure finder in his bearing as he walked farther from the saloon, changing his course aimlessly and just wanting to be alone with his misery. He would return home as soon as he could get his gold down the ridge. He would flaunt his wealth. He would make the fat and fussy proprietor of the shoe store look like very small potatoes. Or, he might never go back. He found gloomy satisfaction in playing with such notions. Then the irony of it suddenly hit him, and he halted and laughed immoderately and gasped:

"I never needed to come out here to be cold decked. Hartford scored first."

While he was walking and brooding, pitying himself, or laughing at himself, a horseman rode up to Curts' place and entered.

"Howdy, Pasquel," greeted Curts.

"There is a man walking, Señor Curts." The Mexican pointed north.

"The red headed young feller. Blew in from Mokelumne Hill. He's just bought a claim of Boston John."

Instead of evoking an appreciative grin, Curts' word caused the man to show his teeth in a snarl.

"Red. The hair is red. Then the eyes are blue. I will keel him."

He turned toward the door, but Curts lunged across the bar and caught him by a shoulder and demanded fiercely—

"What'n hell you think you're doing?"

The men came from the card room. Curts released his grip but vaulted over the bar and stood between the Mexican and the door. He explained to his associates—

"Tony here allows he'll croak the greenhorn."

Jim Dance laughed silently. Boston John inquired—

"Well, what's stopping him?"

"I am, for the present," said Curts.

Gospel Jones remonstrated:

"Such a senseless waste of energy! Why should you, Antonio, thirst for the young man's blood?"

"He struck me, Señor Gospel," cried Pasquel. "I do not sleep good. The chin ache all the time."

"He's a sheep," laughed Curts. "You must 'a' pestered him most rampagous."

"He struck me. I keel him."

Elijah Freeman smoothed his gray hair and announced.

"I'm agin bloodshed. I'm mortally agin it in this case. Never helps. Always hurts. The young man has influential friends back home. If he's rubbed out there'll be a hunt for his slayers. He's been free with his money. He has some left. Nigh on to a thousand. Tony can't run this outfit to fit in with his whims. We'll all be blamed for any killings up here. The young man can be traced to Mokelumne Hill. Stage driver fetched him a letter here. If anything happens to him up here this place must close up and we'll all have to run for it. Three out of five of us at least are agin it."

Boston John, usually so favorably inclined to the short, direct way, coughed gently for attention. He surprised his mates by saying:

"Freeman's talk sounds right. Pasquel, if you hurt a hair of that young man's head you'll reckon with me. *Sabe?*"

Pasquel at once subsided. He stood in great dread of the killer. He surrendered, saying—

"If Señor Boston says so, it must be so."

"After he's quit us and is off the ridge it's none of our business. But nothing like that up till Curts, or me, gives the word."

"Or until I take a notion to pop him off," spoke up Dance.

Boston John wheeled and stared fixedly at the young man and said softly:

"Damn you, Jim. I'll be the death of you yet."

THE MATTER dropped then and there with all hands taking a drink. Pasquel put down his glass and sullenly announced that he wished to visit Toby's claim. He would ride up and be away before Toby could get there. If he met him he would do him no harm. Curts caught Freeman's eye and winked. The old man said:

"I'll ride along with you. Just starting for home. The greenhorn's mooning over his letter from the East. We'll look around all we want to. All right to tell him about the snake, Curts?"

Curts laughed and said readily:

"Yes, tell him. Tony's one of us. He may find something in it to take the sour look off his face."

But although Freeman explained the ruse of salting the claim with much gusto Pasquel failed to be amused.

"Some time, some day, Señor Freeman, I shall keel that *hombre*," he announced quietly.

The two mounted and rode to the claim. Freeman showed where the gold had been shot into the ground and stressed the fact that the ground had been "salted" before the young man's eyes. Pasquel was not interested. He started to walk across the claim to the cabin when suddenly he halted and stared wildly at the ground.

"Another snake?" called out Freeman jocularly.

"*Madre de Dios!*" gasped Pasquel. He trembled violently and with mouth agape slowly sank to his kees.

Freeman ran to his side, thinking he must have collapsed from some sudden malady. He shook him by the shoulder, asking:

"What ails you? Sick?"

"Seeck? *Sí, señor,* seeck in the heart!" And he clapped a hand to his breast and pointed to an excavation.

Freeman stared at the hole, and intelligence slowly kindled his gaze.

"A box, or something square 'n' hard enough to stand the pressure of the earth, came out of that hole," he muttered.

He stepped into the excavation and combed his fingers through the loose dirt. He jerked up his head as if a serpent had bitten him, but between his fingers he was holding a fifty dollar gold piece that was issued from the private mint of Moffatt and Company.

"Treasure! The cub's found treasure," he wailed.

"My treasure!" screamed Pasquel, snatching futilely at the coin. "He's got the beautiful gold Joaquin Murietta hid up here when chased. I had the story from my brother, who rode with him, and who was keeled at Sonora. I have looked and looked. Now do you say the gringo pig must not be keeled?"

Freeman got on his feet and dragged his companion some distance from the claim. He was breathing so rapidly it was several minutes before he could speak. He looked down the ridge to be sure Toby Lang was not in sight. Then he answered Pasquel's question by saying:

"Kill the only man who knows where the stuff's hid? You poor fool. Touch a hair of his red head and I'll slice you into giblets. Go into the shack 'n' look around. Don't mess things up. If I whistle you come out."

Pasquel dove into the cabin and was back in a few minutes. He shook his head. Freeman, suspicious of treachery in all that concerned money, visited the cabin. Half a minute satisfied him that no treasure was hidden there. Rejoining the Mexican, he led him among the big trees and halted for an important talk. The Mexican agreed to all that Freeman proposed and said:

"You and I, *amigo,* will keep the secret. You and I will find the gold and divide it."

Freeman was old in cunning, and he liked not the lurid gleam in the man's eyes.

"All right, Pasquel. We understand each other. Now we'll hustle back to the saloon before the boys think something is up."

"There are the marks. We must cover them," said Pasquel.

Freeman shook his head.

"The youngster will do that when he notices them. If he sees us fussing around the claim he'll be on his guard. All we got to do now is to watch him till he leads us to it."

"That is good, *amigo,*" murmured the Mexican, his voice as soft and sleek as silk. "Just us two."

THEY covered the distance at a gallop, Freeman never drawing ahead of his companion. Toby was mounting his horse when they drew up in front of the saloon. All Mexicans looked alike to Toby and he would have passed them, with a nod to Freeman, if not for the ferocious hate showing in Pasquel's face. Toby glanced at him a second time and then grinned broadly and rubbed a hand across his face.

"How's your chin, neighbor?"

Pasquel, standing ten feet away, gave a screech and drew a knife and a gun. Freeman threw an arm around his neck

and dragged him still farther back and cried:

"The fool's gone crazy. He'll soon clear his wits."

"If he ever makes a move toward me again I'll shoot," Toby warned, his voice a bit unsteady from excitement. He stood with a gun drawn until Freeman had led Pasquel into the saloon. Curts met them just inside the door and drew back his fist to dash it into the Mexican's face. Freeman swung Pasquel to one side and the blow went wild.

"Chief! Stop it! Big news! Simmer down!" cried Freeman.

"You dare tell?" gasped Pasquel.

"Seeing that you can't be trusted I dassent keep it to myself." Then to Curts, who still had his fist clinched, he said, "I've always been above board with you boys. I've got big news. Gather close as I ain't going to shout it."

Intensely curious, Boston John, Gospel Jones and Jim Dance crowded around him. Pasquel was inarticulate with rage as he realized his secret was to be shared in by four more men.

"Just you and me," he muttered.

"What one knows all must know," insisted Freeman. "You can tell it or I will."

Submitting to the inevitable, Pasquel related the story he had told to Freeman. Even his rage could not prevent his Latin love for dramatic effect from keeping the discovery of the gold piece till the last. Freeman supplemented the climax by placing the gold piece on the bar for all to admire.

Boston John, usually unperturbed, swore explosively. Gospel Jones ruffled his fringe of whiskers and blew his nose violently. Jim Dance turned on the Mexican and hissed:

"You'd hold out on us, would you?"

"It was mine!" cried the Mexican. "I watched the gold that goes out from San Andreas. I come to tell when the next lot goes out. But Murietta's treasure was my secret before I worked with any of you."

Curts hammered a fist on the bar and announced:

"We'll talk business and nothing else. It looks like the greenhorn had stumbled on to a fortune. How much was there in the treasure, Pasquel?"

"Oh, so much. Four or five hundred thousand!"

THE SWEAT ran down Curts' face. Boston John stood with eyes half closed, and the veins on his wrists and hands stood out like dark whipcords. Pasquel explained:

"It was in boxes of rawhide. So big, said my brother, who helped pack them," and he measured with his hands a close description of the containers. "There were six—eight—I don't know how many boxes. Some filled with dust, some with nuggets, and some with that." He pointed to the fifty dollar piece, which Freeman hastily restored to his pocket.

Curts took a bottle from the bar and announced:

"This is too big to be talked over here. Bar the door, Jim. Business is closed. We'll sit in the back room and have a powwow."

The men trooped after him to the card room. Curts said—

"The first thing to be decided is what shall we do with Lang?"

"Kill him!" hissed Dance.

"He must be watched day and night till he betrays the hiding place," advised Gospel Jones.

Coughing gently, Boston John said:

"We must take him up back a ways and try fire on his feet until he tells where it is. Pasquel can be the fire tender." Pasquel's eyes glittered with approval.

Freeman was visibly disturbed. He would bilk and cheat and steal but he never could abide violence. Tilting back against the wall, he insisted:

"Watching is the slow way, but the sure way. I'll never vote for burning any one's hoofs, or for sending them over the ridge. Pasquel wanted to keep the matter from you, but I played square. I'm thinking my say so ought to be heeded."

With a yell of fury Jim Dance left his

stool to stand before the old man.

"You tame sheep!" he raged. "With a fortune almost in our hands you'd palaver and fiddle around and let it slip away. Your advice? How'd you like to have me show you what I think of your advice?"

"Shut up, Jim. That'll do. Drink your liquor and squat," ordered Curts.

"It's always 'shut up'. It's always this and always that to Jim Dance," whined the youngster. "You folks seem to forget I was talked about afore I ever hitched up with this outfit."

"Yes, yes, Jim," soothed Curts, "you've got a name for standing no nonsense."

"But out of all your shooting and rampaging what's it ever put in your pockets?" asked Freeman.

Dance became quiet, as if thinking. His voice was low as he answered:

"That's right, in a way. I've killed without profit when folks tried to put upon me. You've gone through life taking kicks and cuffs. You're a tame sheep. You don't dast set in a game where a man needs nerve. You've been slapped so much you sorter like it. Why, damn you, take a slap from me!"

His opened plan cracked against the old man's face, upsetting his balance and sending him to the floor. As he struck he yanked out a gun and the crashing detonation drowned the cry of alarm from Gospel Jones. With an expression of mild surprise Dance weaved forward, seemed to catch his balance and then pitched face down, half across his slayer.

Boston John was the first to recover. He angrily cried:

"Damn you, Freeman! That was my job. Always allowed I'd rub the pup out. Now you've stepped in ahead of me. So you can be dangerous, eh?"

Still gripping his gun and relieving himself of the weight of Dance's body, Freeman replied simply:

"I have my ways. A jackrabbit will show fight if he's abused long enough." He got to his feet and stood leaning limply against the wall, revolver dangling from his hand, and said, "I want to know just how I stand with you, Curts."

Curts glowered on in silence, finished his drink and said:

"You stand all right, Freeman. Dance would have trouble. But you can't have any of Dance's share."

"That's no more'n fair," said Gospel Jones. "You've deprived us of a useful man in the San Andreas business. You shouldn't be rewarded for it."

"I've been rewarded," said Freeman. "Dance is dead. And many times he's put upon me. Now let's settle about burning the truth from Lang. I'm agin it. Vote on it and then I'll ask some one to help me dig a grave."

Gospel Jones bounced to his feet and cried:

"All right, boys. No burning. Just keep quiet and watch. I'll help Freeman hide his dead."

He was facing Curts, who was about to assert his leadership. Curts caught the slow wink and, although mystified for the moment he nodded assent. Boston John smiled. He was a man who was held by no pacts.

THE REMAINS of the wayward youth were taken some distance from, and out of sight of, the saloon. Gospel was very active, trotting back for another shovel. Curts and Boston, having no relish for manual labor, returned to the saloon. Pasquel followed them, vastly surprised that he had not been ordered to do the digging.

As Gospel and Freeman labored, the former dwelt on the mutability of human affairs. He quoted from the Scriptures as to the brevity and uncertainty of man's earthly span. He paused, when waist deep, and mopped the sweat from his brow. Freeman said:

"It's deep enough."

"No, no, Brother Freeman. Let's be thorough. Poor Jim lacked chances for improving his mind; but he was a true friend, once he gave his friendship. Deep'n' snug's my motto."

The soil was the wash from heavy rains and the digging was not hard. They spelled each other at frequent inter-

vals. Freeman was taking his turn at resting when his companion's head was barely above the edge of the hole. At a distance of only a few feet his head was hidden from view because of the heaped up earth. Freeman craned his neck and watched the top of Gospel's bare head. At last he inquired—

"Going right down through to Chiny?"

Gospel rested and fished for a handkerchief and mopped his face.

"Brother Freeman," he replied, "we've dug deeper than I expected. So busy with thinking that I've kept shoveling out."

"You've had your way. You've gone very, very deep, Gospel. Are you through?"

"I believe I am, Brother Freeman. Why, I do believe I've dug deep enough to bury two men."

"Two or three," murmured Freeman.

Gospel finished wiping his face and slowly restored the handkerchief to his pocket. Freeman, lying on his left side, watched through half closed lids. He saw Gospel's expression change as he started lifting his hand. With the hand still out of sight he asked—

"You really think it's deep enough for two, Brother Freeman?"

"Plenty deep for two," muttered Freeman.

Their eyes met, and Gospel knew his fell purpose had been guessed.

"You're the second man," he suddenly yelled, and jerked up his hand.

Freeman raised the gun that had been resting on the ground behind his leg, and fired. Slowly, with no outcry, Gospel sank from sight.

The shot was heard in the saloon. Curts and Boston John exchanged grim smiles. Pasquel started for the door. Curts called after him—

"Come back here, Tony."

"There was a shot!"

"Nothing to you. No friend of yours is hurt."

"No one's hurt," gruffly said Boston John. "What you don't know never will put your head in a noose."

Pasquel sat down and waited. He began to understand. He hoped it was Freeman, who had overridden his wishes by telling his secret. The three waited. An hour passed. Boston John suddenly jumped to his feet and announced—

"I'm going to look around a bit."

"I'll go with you. Come along, Pasquel," said Curts.

The three made their way to where a long low mound testified to work finished. Curts spoke for the three when he asked—

"Which one?"

Boston John swore terrible oaths and raged:

"Gospel has fooled us. He has a notion where the stuff's hid. He's got a long start."

He wheeled and raced for the saloon with Curts and Pasquel pounding along at his heels. The three were in the saddle about the same time. Boston John took the lead, heading for Lang's claim.

CHAPTER VI

DOUBLE TREASURE

LANG was in his shack and had removed his belt and guns, and was wondering how he could make a bed without even a pair of blankets when he heard horsemen outside. He opened the door and saw Curts, Boston John and Pasquel. He spoke first, telling Curts:

"I forgot something very important. I forgot to buy any blankets. I'll have to have several pair to make that wooden box sleep well."

"We knew you'd forgotten something, Lang," said Curts quietly. "We've come to jog your memory."

Lang sensed danger, although he could not imagine that his golden secret had been guessed. None had seen him and the girl when they hid the gold under the Freeman cabin. It was unthinkable that she could have betrayed him. His face was blank as he met Curts' smoldering gaze. He asked:

"Well, what is it? All I can think of is blankets. But it wouldn't take three of

you to ride up here and remind me of that, though."

As he spoke he edged back and was gathering himself for a precipitate withdrawal inside the rude shelter when three guns, as one, were aimed at him. Curts barked:

"Light and search him, Pasquel! Boston, tie his hands at his back!"

Lang was seized and overpowered, but not before he had knocked Pasquel down. He would have disposed of Boston in the same fashion if Curts had not jumped his horse forward and struck him over the head with the barrel of his gun. Lang was knocked down but, thanks to the thick mat of fiery hair, he did not lose consciousness. He was trussed up very quickly.

Curts entered the cabin to satisfy himself that the gold was not there. Pasquel was removing the prisoner's shoes and socks when he emerged. Boston John was collecting dry grass and dead twigs.

With the sweat running down his face, with his eyes glazed by a terrible fear, Lang cried:

"What are you thinking to do? What's this all about? You cheated me by salting and selling me a rotten claim. If you want what little gold I have left, take it, and release me."

Boston John lost his usual stolidity under the terrible urge to get his hands on the grossly overestimated fortune. Dropping on his knees beside Lang, he fairly screamed:

"Where is it? We'll have it! We'll burn your feet to stubs if you don't tell. Where is it?"

"Where's what?" asked Lang, his blue eyes reflecting fear as he saw the fire increase in strength, saw the devilish smile on Pasquel's face.

Over his shoulder Boston called to Pasquel:

"What you waiting for? Forgot about the smash on your chin?"

Growling and grunting like an animal, Pasquel grabbed Lang's feet, which were tied together at the ankles. Drawing up his legs Lang kicked and sent Pasquel violently backward. Boston, maniacal in his impatience to find the gold, whipped out his knife. Then he was remembering, and with a groan he tossed the weapon aside. Pasquel grabbed up the knife and rushed forward, shrieking terrible threats. Curts tripped him up and secured the blade. Boston John sat on Lang's knees and said:

"Have your fun with fire, Pasquel. He can't kick no more."

Pasquel eagerly placed a brand against a naked foot. Lang opened his mouth to cry out, but remembered the girl. Too much noise might call her to the shack. If he revealed the hiding place of the gold they would find her at the cabin, and it would be a greater mercy to kill her outright. He groaned and writhed. Grinning down at him, Boston waited. Curts told Pasquel:

"That light stuff's no good. Get something that'll make real coals."

Pasquel ran into the cabin and brought out a cracker box, which he smashed and fed to the fire.

"Want to talk now?" asked Boston. "Where'd you hide it?"

LANG returned the savage gaze steadily. The exigency of each moment prevented any comprehensive anticipation of the torture to come. He was filled with a terrible hatred of the monsters. For the girl's sake alone, he kept telling himself, he must keep silent. Boston felt the knees buckle beneath him. He saw the sweat rolling down the prisoner's face. He did not need to look around to know that Pasquel was using the fire. Curts motioned for Pasquel to desist. He said to Lang:

"You're acting like a crazy man. The game has gone against you. Tell and take you share."

"I have nothing to tell," cried Lang.

"I have!" called a shrill voice from the edge of the timber.

All eyes switched to discover the intruder. The girl stepped into sight long enough to call out:

"It's hidden under our cabin. Leave him alone, or I'll shoot!"

Curts leaned over Lang and demanded—

"Is that the truth?"

Lang nodded and closed his eyes. Curts ordered—

"Pasquel, stay here with him till we make sure."

Pasquel answered by leaping on his horse and riding for the timber. Boston John, who had appeared dazed by the intervention of the girl, came to life and roared:

"Old Gospel will git it! He'll be making off with it!"

He mounted his horse and galloped after the Mexican. Curts drew a gun and stared down at Lang. If it was a lie he would need Lang again. If it was but a ruse for the girl to rescue him he would need to ride hard and far to escape three determined men. More thoughtful than his two companions, he took Lang's horse along with him when he followed his companions. The girl swiftly gained Lang's side and cut him free. She wept silently as she saw his blistered feet.

"Get my guns from the cabin," cried Lang as he dressed his feet.

"Where will you go? They've taken your horse," she sobbed.

"Go? I'm going after them. You clear out."

"Why didn't you tell and save your poor feet?"

"Silly! They'd found you there. Hide out in the woods."

He was off. His feet caused him to limp badly until anger and excitement dulled the pain. He was almost at the cabin, a gun in each hand, when he realized that she was keeping him company, running as softly and easily as a wild animal. He gestured for her to keep back. She held her course. They sighted the desperadoes in the timber and in another rod glimpsed the men. With staccato abruptness guns began to explode.

"Gospel Jones is ahead of them! They're killing each other off!" cried Lang.

"But how could he know?" asked the girl.

"They're shooting at the cabin. The cabin shoots back! It's Gospel, or—"

He did not finish. She completed it for him, saying—

"Or my uncle."

They stole closer. With a sob the girl whispered:

"It's my uncle. He must have returned while I was going over to see you."

"How can you tell it isn't Gospel?"

"He's using a rifle. None of the others would know where to find it."

The besiegers believed differently; for they believed Freeman was buried in the grave with Jim Dance. In a lull of firing, Curts yelled:

"Stop it, Gospel. Share'n' share alike."

FREEMAN showed his face at the window for a second. A howl of execration and amazement rose from the three men. Boston John screamed:

"He's got it! He's got it! The old coot's cold decked Gospel 'n' the rest of us."

"I don't know what this is all about," cried Freeman. "Shot Jones in self-defense. You come here thinking to find him. Then I can guess things. You set him on me. The stuff's near here. Come ahead and get it!"

"Keep under cover," Curts shouted to his companions. "Pasquel, go back and fetch the girl. We'll see if he wants to kill his own flesh 'n' blood."

Pasquel started to retreat, taking great care to keep a giant bole between him and the cabin window. When he deemed himself safe he grew careless and started to run north through the timber. Freeman, armed with a rifle, waited for a fleeting glimpse and shot him off his feet just as Lang was about to perform that office. Boston John fired as the rifle cracked, and Freeman's head and shoulders lurched over the sill and remained there, the hands extended as if he were reaching for something.

"Keep back!" Lang told the girl as the two men hooted triumphantly and started for the cabin.

He fired at Boston John, who was about to vanish behind a tree, and shattered the left arm. With a terrible cry of pain and rage Boston faced about and screamed—

"Damn you, Curts!"

"Keep covered, you fool. It's the tenderfoot. He and the girl followed us," yelled Curts.

Boston might not have believed this if not for beholding the flash of the gay calico dress as the girl shifted her position. Boston called out:

"Circle to the right. I'll go to the left."

He paused to knot a handkerchief around his spoiled arm, tying the knot with the aid of his teeth. Curts immediately began scouting in a half circle to place Lang and the Freeman girl between two fires.

"Curts on your right," whispered the girl as she crowded against him to keep out of range.

"T'other one must be on the left," muttered Lang. "Lie flat and close to the trunk."

She promptly obeyed and he threw his coat over her to cover the bright checks of her dress and drew the enemies' fire by dodging to another tree. Boston's gun boomed and Lang saw where the lead hit the bark directly ahead of him. He dropped and fired at Boston, whose mouth was opening to sound a note of triumph. Turning on his side, he felt the wind of Curts' first bullet, then the two fired together. Curts lurched sidewise, but steadied himself to throw down his gun for a third essay. Lang fired twice, rapidly, and Curts collapsed, his weapon exploding harmlessly.

The Freeman girl ran to him, hysterically crying:

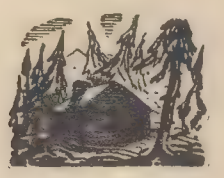
"You are hurt! You drew their fire to save me! Where are you hurt?"

"I'm not hurt," he panted as he crawled to his feet and stared at the two silent forms. "I told you I could shoot—and I can."

AFTER they were married in San Francisco, and the gold had been disposed of at the mint, Mrs. Lang said tearfully:

"Where you go I'll want to go, Toby, even if it's back to Hartford. But I can't forgive that girl for her deceit and poor taste. However, I'll go there with you and be happy, knowing you are happy."

"Good land! Why, my dear, what's the matter with California? Grandest State in the Union. Gave me my wife. We'd be silly to leave this land of opportunity."



The CAMP-FIRE

Lost Gold

PROSPECTS look pretty dubious for the recovery of this treasure—the one mentioned in a late issue, by Comrade Bridges. It had been cached, he believed, along a cattle trail which had vanished.

Brother Wells arises to point out improbabilities:

"I think that I can answer the question asked by Comrade Bridges about the Austin and Pike's Peak cattle trail in just four words—there never was any.

As far as is known the first herds driven north from Texas were those to be shipped from Abilene, Kansas, to the eastern markets at the time of the building of the Kansas Pacific Railroad, about 1867 or '68—I have not the exact date handy. No herds were driven to Colorado until some time after this, the population of the then territory being only a few thousand miners working the placers on the creeks along the foothills; and game of all kinds being so plentiful that there was little or no demand for beef.

Afterward, when the Colorado ranges were being stocked, the herds destined for there generally followed the regular northbound trail as far as the Cimarron, up that stream a way, across to the Arkansas and up it. It must be understood that except at a few places, like favorable crossing places on the larger rivers, none of these cattle trails was what is generally understood as being a trail, that is, a well beaten road, the reason being that the herds could not all follow the same route and find plenty of grass, and in some places, water. Therefore each trail boss used his own judgment as to what route to follow, depending on grass, water, floods in the larger rivers, etc.

The tale of treasure does not ring exactly true. The time was just after the Civil War, when no gold was in circulation, everything being in greenbacks, though of course the herd of beef could have been paid for in gold dust, but, as I have said, there was then no market for much beef, if any, in the mines, and the Cheyennes being very much on the warpath east and south of Denver, it would have been almost impossible for a herd to have got through. Also, there is absolutely no record of any Texas cattle being driven to Colorado previous to the opening of the trail to Abilene."

—WILLIAM WELLS, Bend, Oregon.

Anyhow

She ain't jest what she used to be,
But, hell! That ain't no news to me.
I've watched the shiftin' views, you see,
For nigh to forty year.
Since the days of open ranges
There has been a heap o' changes;
For the things that man arranges
Is, at times, almighty queer.

First the nester an' the squatter
Come an' fenced the choicest water;
Stringin' bob-wire which they'd oughter
Had to swaller, for a joke.
Then the shepherd, with his collie,
An' his stinkin' sheep. By golly,
Though! We made them see the folly
Of their ways—through powder smoke.

Then the Herefords an' Whitefaces
Come to take the longhorns' places.
Mowers clackin' on the mesas
Where the dogies used to stand.
If a waddy now was able
Just to manicure a stable,
Ride a pitchfork, drive a staple,
He was rated a tophand.

Now! You see that dust cloud risin'
Over there on the horizon?
You jest watch! It's right surprizin'

What that rodeo includes!
Punchers now has got to have a
Right peculiar kind of savvy;
For they rides herd on a cavvy
Of danged, four-eyed, knee-panted dudes!

Yet somethin' seems to grip me here;
It isn't jest the atmosphere
That makes my heart beat kinda queer,
An' keeps me glad I came.
Though most ever' train delivers
City sports with burnt-out livers;
Golf balls, radios, an' flivvers.
She's my country, jest the same.

LARRY O'CONNER.

The Great Lakes

COMRADE KRIEG takes exception to the way Karl W. Detzer depicted a storm on Lake Michigan. Having crossed that body of water a number of times, from Chicago to Charlevoix and Mackinac, to Washington Island; from Milwaukee to Manistee; to Ludington, Benton Harbor and other lake ports, I did not question the facts behind the tale. But Comrades Krieg and Detzer have the floor:

Permit me to say a few words regarding a story written by Karl W. Detzer entitled "Lifelines," and published in the June 15th issue of *Adventure*.

The story certainly is exaggerated and Mr. Detzer doesn't know a thing—nothing about the Lakes.

When were there ever ten-twenty-thirty foot waves piling up there? Applesauce! Lake Superior is the largest; still it is far too small a lake for a wave to attain such gigantic proportions; and believe me, a thirty foot wave is *some* wave!

I've sailed salt water and fresh for the last four years, therefore my right to criticize.—JOS. A. KRIEG, 79 Cinderella St., Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

And Detzer's reply:

I am hastening to reply to your very interesting letter to the editors of *Adventure* concerning my story, "Lifelines," which appeared recently in that magazine.

As to the criticism, I am inclined to argue. Your rather forceful statement that "Detzer doesn't know a thing . . . nothing about the lakes," leads me to wonder just how long an experience is required to acquaint one with a subject.

No one knows better than I that it is folly to write about matters not wholly familiar. Take the salt seas which you mention, and which you know so well. I shouldn't attempt to write salt water tales, shouldn't even presume to criticize any one else's. For my experience on salt has been limited.

I have made only two crossings of the Atlantic, once on the White Star liner *Baltic*, once on the Shipping Board *America*. And I've sailed a bit on Mexican windjammers out of Corpus Christi and Point Isabel, on the Gulf, and during the war discovered what it felt like to see the white path of a torpedo at night, and the feel of depth bombs, when I commanded troops for a short time on the steamer *Austriland*, Southampton to Havre. Oh, yes, and a short voyage, Brest to Nantes on a seven-stick French schooner . . . yes. Seven masts . . . and a few short cruises with the Bordeaux fishing fleet into the Bay of Biscay.

No . . . I can't write salt water stuff, I don't know it well enough.

But as to the Lakes . . . that's a different story. I discover in your letter that you've sailed four years on salt water and fresh, and therefore have a right to criticize. Granted that three months of the four years was spent on salt, and the other three years nine months on fresh water, still I have a start of twenty-seven years on you. For I have lived beside Lake Michigan, sailed on it, have watched the sails disappear and gasoline come in, for more than thirty years. Lake Michigan is my home. My own house looks out on an arm of it, I get my mail in a fishing village, the steam fog signals of four light houses and a light vessel rumble in my ears on foggy nights. As a boy I sailed with the fishermen out of my home port, here, under canvas, I've decked it on more than one good vessel that's a-bottom now.

No, I refuse to admit that I don't know the Lakes.

As to the height of waves; I grant that I've never seen them thirty feet high on Lake Michigan. But they ran that high, so old sailors tell me, in the Spring blow that piled up twenty-eight schooners carrying lumber to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. And again in 1912. That was early fall; if I remember rightly it was September.

It was that gale I described in my story. The steamer *Amazonas* piled up at Sleeping Bear that night, and the schooner *Paisley*, Captain Symington commanding, went ashore at Glen Arbor pier. It was Symington who told me that a wave thirty feet high snapped his hawsers. I don't know how high it was. I was ashore, waiting for a chance to help launch the surfboat. I went out in the first boat that reached the schooner. It was not quite daylight, and I know that even then the waves were running twelve and fifteen feet, five hours after the crest of the blow had passed.

But even with my long experience on this coast, I don't attempt, unaided, to write technical details. Before starting the story which you criticize, I went to Sleeping Bear coast guard station, and spent several days and nights with the captain and crew. I went over details; studied all available records, I walked patrol with the older men, and together we framed the yarn. Then, while working on it, not a day passed but that I either went to a coast guard station, or consulted coastguardsmen in the fishing harbor here, making sure that I was right. And when it was done I put it before a jury, reading

it aloud to men who should know. My helpers were old Lakes sailors, boatmen and surfmen, fishermen and steamboat men.

Among them are the following, each of whom contributed not a little to the tale:—

Louis Dustin, surfman retired at Pentwater, after thirty-one years service.

Captain Fred Marsh, who commanded Charlevoix station when the *Illinois* went ashore there several years ago, and the crew and passengers were brought ashore with the gun.

Captain John Basch, now commanding North Manitou station.

The entire crew at Sleeping Bear station.

Captain Steward and Chief Engineer John Peters of Gray's Reef light vessel.

Captain Tracy Grosvenor of Leland, commander of the island mail boat.

These, and many others I consulted. Their experience, together with my own, should make a water-tight yarn, don't you think?—KARL W. DETZER.

Cowboy Carols

I

Women

Used to ride around with Ida,
Down in Idaho;
Knew an Anna in Montana,
Thought I was her beau;
In Nevada once I had a
Little sweetie, too;
Every Honey got my money
Then—Ta! Ta! Adoo!

Got my trimmin' from the women,
Pony, I am through!
Love is silly, there's no filly
Who is true but you.
Back to battle longhorn cattle,
Ridin' range with men.
Girls, I scoff 'em; I am off 'em
—Till I'm flush again!

II

Not the Type

Oh I'm a poor cowboy
Just amblin' along.
Accordin' to movies
My outfit is wrong.
I ain't got two guns
That is slung at my belt;
I don't shoot no holes
In another guy's pelt.

I ain't got no silver
On saddle or hat,
But I'm a real cowboy
In spite of all that.
For though there is changes
In playin' the game
The heart of a cowboy
Is always the same!

III

Enployment Wanted

If you've got a job for a cowpunchin' guy
I'm ready and willin' to sign;
At ropin' an' brandin' I rate pretty high
I ain't so bad ridin' the line.
I'll even mend fences an' help to pitch hay
(For which kind of thing I ain't strong)
But—if there is *milkin'*, I'll bid you good day
An' just be proceedin' along.

IV

Eats

At times in the city I've dined very pretty
On all kinds of fancified stuff;
For though I am given to hard, simple livin'
My tastes ain't so terrible rough.
I like demi-tasses an' patty-foy-grasses;
An' dishes them French fellers make;
I finds very thrillin'—but just for plain fillin'
There's nuthin' like chuck wagon steak!

You can't quite tell whether it's rubber or leather
(At least such is frequent the case).
It's often tough carvin', but when you're half-starvin'
It sure fits that hole in your face!
It's he-food for he-men, so bring it to me, men,
When I am so empty I ache;
We ain't no light lunchers but plumb famished punchers—
Come on with that chuck wagon steak!

V

No Poetry Aloud

I'm just a plain cowboy an' not any poet.
(I don't have to tell you for people to know it)
But sometimes I rolls from my blankets at night.
Say, just before dawn starts to break into light,
An looks at the stars in the clear desert sky
An' something inside me gets glowin', an' I
Have feelin's an' thoughts that if I could express
Would make me a kind of a Homer, I guess.

Then stars grows some paler an' dawn starts to break
As if the whole world was just yawnin' awake;
The buttes shows up gray an' then purple, then pink,

An' the dawn wind is just like a cool singin' drink
An' if I could say what I think an' I feel
I'd make you some poetry, *livin'* an' *real*,
An' then be too much of a roughneck to show it!
For I'm just a cowboy an' not any poet.

BERTON BRALEY.

Deadly Gas

IN CONNECTION with his oil field tale, "Man Size," appearing in this issue of the magazine, Foster-Harris has a word to say concerning the Yates Field and the poisonous gas encountered at various drillings. Mr. Foster-Harris himself is editor of the largest oil newspaper in the United States; and in this instance he enclosed photographs and bulletins of our Department of Commerce to corroborate his statements.

This tale is laid in an actual field, with the genuine scenery and so on, actually existing right now. It would be possible, for example, to get in a car and visit every place Ha' Pint and O'Neil passed through.

The Plains Company, all characters appearing in the yarn, and the action, of course, are purely imaginary; but I have tried to make them typical. The detail is faithful to what actually would be found under similar circumstances in this pool.

The Yates Field is probably the greatest field America has ever seen; certainly it is by far the greatest shallow field. The reason you don't hear more about it is because it's so remote that it practically is bottled up. They can't get the oil out to markets.

I have gone over every foot of the ground covered in this story, was down there with my staff photographer, and took most of the attached pictures quite recently. This is the first appearance of this field in fiction, and, I believe—the first use of the hydrogen sulphide situation in a story.

Attached United States Bureau of Mines bulletin on hydrogen sulphide dangers and problems in Southwest Texas fields, gives background data of this story.

THE HYDROGEN sulphide or "rotten gas" problem has not come to the fore in the Yates Field as yet, except possibly in a minor way. However, several fields in the immediate general area (McCamey and Big Lake for example) are the leading examples of the hydrogen sulphide problem. The tests encountering rotten gas as given in this story (fictional of course) are located not in Pecos County, but in Crockett, just across the Pecos River. Conditions in Crockett being different, as demonstrated by actual tests, it is entirely possible that tests could behave exactly as described.

Hydrogen sulphide is colorless, heavier than air, fatal in concentrations of over two per cent. There have been numerous observed instances of small wild animals being found dead near tanks, just as occurs to the chaparral bird in this story. On the "Lost Strip" many mules and horses were killed in this way. Also human fatalities reported. The gas, especially in low concentrations, (there being no living victims of high concentrations, data here is lacking), has a "sickly-sweetish taste." Is explosive when mixed with air, will burn with blue flame, "flows" into hollows, pits, etc., when air is still, as described.

Opening scene is supposedly in Grube (an actual town), although for obvious reasons this is not stressed. There are actually Texas Rangers stationed in Grube (reason is obvious) at the present time (March, 1928).

Trip across Pecos, through towns, etc., actually can be taken as described.

The Plains Petroleum Corporation, of course, is imaginary, as are the "D" lease wells described, and all characters appearing herein.

Rankin trip can be taken as described. Rankin is an actual town.

Organization of the Plains Company is roughly typical of a big oil company organization in such a field. Miller, the "drilling superintendent" in charge of the "D" lease might be a "tool pusher" but probably would be a drilling superintendent as given. The drilling crews on the wells would consist of a driller and tool dresser to each 12-hour shift or "tower", the shifts changing at midnight and noon. Henderson is not a member of the drilling crew, but simply a general laborer, hauling water, moving tools, doing the thousand and one things necessary on an active lease.

Oil company camps as described for the "Plains Company," are typical.

Drilling detail, depths at which showings, pays, etc., are struck, are faithful to the area. Gas has actually been struck in the direction from the field in which the "D" lease is vaguely located herein. Setting casing, cementing, crews, blowouts, etc., are about as would actually happen.—FOSTER-HARRIS.

Bug Eye Asts A Quesshun

W. C. TUTTLE'S book publishers are the Houghton, Mifflin Company of Boston. And our historical expert assures me that Ringo, Halliday and the Earps were genuine flesh and blood—fully as salty as depicted by Walt Coburn.

Say how come my pardner Hank sends my leters (Heck, I almost speld that with 2 t's!) to you insted of me, Bug eye? I havent herd from Hank for so long I begun to think he were ded. And then I pick up a copie of this here magazin adventure and there he's tellin the hole world abot hisself, and callin me good for nothing and useles and Heck knows wat. And say that boy sure dos use atroshus speling and gramer. Take me, Im diferent. I got clear throu the 6st grade, and am pretty well edercatted.

But Hank. They had to burn the schol-house down to git him out of the 2st grade.

Say I bet Hank gits some money writin to you like that. That speling of his would make eny editer set up and take notis. I wunder if I could git money for writin to you? (Ed. Note, NO!)

Say Mr. Rud next time you write to Hank you tel him I wrote and ask him wy the —— (That dash means "hell") he don't come on back to Indianny were he blongs? I been back to Singletree vistin his folks for a month. Say he sure has got a rell girl, Sadie Pelem is her name. I had sevrel dats with her. Ask Hank what he says about that.

I'm down here at Carmel vistin my uncle Jake now. You tel Hank that I ame to stay here a while. Maybee uncle Jake will die he's got lots of coin. If he dont die prety soon I'm going back to Cheese Cloth and tell him to meat there about next fall or spring or sumtime. See. You tell Hank ther is a guy here bigger than him. Hes a grate big red hed feller 6 feet 5 in. and ways 212 pds. His name is Gorge Mcnite. He spells it difrent George McKnight but ther aint no use in usin so much leters. He'd beter come bak and lick him if he wunts to detane the titel of hoosuh gint.

Just laitly this big guy was sick for a heluvawile—2 yeers—but he sur dont look like it now. He trys to sell life insurence but aint much good at it. He wunts to rede all the time and somes says he wunts to be a writer person. But it takes me and hank to do the writin huh Tony? This guy aint but 20 yr. old and just got out of Hi Schol this last Apr. He's amin to start to De Paun, thats a univercity over to green castle, Ind. He got a scholership or sumthing which intitels him to his twition free. Prety soft if you ask me.

You tell hank he beter come and see about it.

You now that guy Hitchcock that wrot in and asked if everybody wanted sum old Adventures. I wrote to him and told him I wanted them maybe I can find out some mor of these lies Hank ben teling on me.

Say tony you know last fall along in Nov. you had a so called complete novel by a guy name Tuttle about a couple felors name Cornknife and Sniffy name Shotgun gold. Was that ever put in a book? oh wil it ever be? Them two guys are sure smart as hel and Butcher Knife has Sherlock Homes backed clear off the mape.

And say Mr. Rud I ben all over the hole west U. S. States but I aint never yet found out what a handerchef dule is. This bird Coburnt says sum thing about it in a piece about Njo Ringo and Doc Holliday and The Earp boys and etc. Plese tel me, is Doc Holliday and the Earp boys real or just a pugment of Walts imaginashun?

Well Anthony gess I beter quit for today dont you think so. Be sure and writ to Hank tell him to shute Wilber. Most felicitshusly yourn—BUG EYE, (*George McKnight, Carmel, Indiana.*)

A Unique Prize Contest

BEGINNING with the next (September fifteenth) issue of *Adventure*, patrons are offered a chance to read, understand and criticize one of the finest adventure action novels ever published in the United States. It is "D'Artagnan", a sequel to "The Three Musketeers" by Alexandre Dumas.

The novel, which will be published in three generous consecutive installments, is founded upon a fragmentary manuscript by Dumas (never printed heretofore), translated and completed by H. Bedford-Jones.

Adventure offers five *double* prizes, for reader criticisms—each preferably about 200 words in length. *A book and a check* go to *each* of the five winners!

The Book

A hand-bound first edition volume of "D'Artagnan" in full leather. In each copy is bound one page of original manuscript—*in the penwriting of Alexandre Dumas!* To real booklovers, one of these volumes should be of tremendous and lasting value. But in addition——

The Check

With each book goes a check prize of $100. For a critique of 200 words length, this means fifty cents a word.

Conditions of the Contest

1. Anyone, except employees of the Butterick Publishing Company and the Covici, Friede book publishing company, may submit an essay criticism.

2. No essays over 1000 words in length will be considered.

3. No manuscripts will be returned.

4. Winning manuscripts will become the property of the Butterick Publishing Company.

5. The general subject of the essays will be: "Is 'D'Artagnan' worthy to rank with the best Dumas—and why, or why not?" Pointed titles aimed at a sector of this question will not be barred. If contributors wish to discuss briefly how much of this novel was actually written by Dumas, that is allowable.

6. Judges of the contest will be the editors of *Adventure*.

7. The contest will close December 1

8. Announcement of the prizewinners will be made in the February 1 issue of *Adventure*.—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Pearling

A MAN moved by the craving for adventure would find it in full measure in these waters, but the odds are pretty much against his chances of getting rich quick.

Request:—"I have tried fishing and alluvial gold digging in New Zealand, am 30 years of age and used to all kinds of manual labor, have been a clerk, A. B. seaman, fisherman and farmer and am willing to tackle anything, no matter what the hardships. Being interested in pearl fishing, I would be very grateful for information about the pearl fishing industry in Australia.

If there is no chance in the pearling industry could you please suggest some other business in Northern Australia which offers inducements. Buffalo hunting? I have a small capital.

I would like to ask a few questions such as:

1. Where should I go to get a knowledge of the pearling industry?

2. Are there any jobs for a white man working for wages in the industry and how are same paid?

3. What are the chances of getting such a job and how would I go about it and to whom should I apply?

4. How are the communications to the place you would recommend and what the necessary traveling cash?

5. Is there any special equipment necessary?"

—R. WIDEROE, Lyttelton, New Zealand.

Reply, by Mr. Alan Foley:—You are chiefly seeking information as to pearling; and I want to tell you emphatically that you would be very ill advised to go to pearling headquarters to try your fortune. You are much more likely to deplete your already modest capital than to increase it substantially.

The center of the pearling industry is in the extreme northwest corner of Australia, at Broome. You would get there by taking a boat from N. Z. to Sydney, transhipping to Fremantle, in West Australia, and again transhipping to a West Australian coastal boat that runs to Port Hedland, Marble Bar, Broome, Darwin, etc. Your prospects of securing employment on a pearling lugger would be slight, as the boats are largely manned by Asiatics (mostly Japanese) and the diving is almost exclusively done by Japanese. White navigators are employed, but they must possess a very complete

knowledge of coastal waters and be well up in the hazardous task of handling small craft in treacherous seas. During cyclone and typhoon seasons (around March of each year) the entire fleet is tied up.

Were you actuated by the spirit of adventure I would say that in these northern waters you might secure it in full measure, but as a means of livelihood I would most strongly advise you to keep away from this quarter of the globe. The entire industry is too firmly under control for an outsider to hope to establish a successful footing.

You might, of course, have a go at the buffaloes in the Northern Territory, but no grave risk is involved and the few pounds you might collect from hides secured would not bring a fortune by the time you got them transported to a railroad or port. Also you might go "chasing the weight" (looking for gold), but while there is an undoubted fascination in the task, the prospects of a big strike are remote indeed.

On the whole the only reasonable prospects that I can recommend to you would be to try settling in the back country. At first you would need to get employment, until you learned the ropes. Then, with the little capital you have and the further capital you would save from your employment, you could start as a land baron on your own account. There are undoubted prospects for young men willing and able to give of their best in the outback centers—but even there fortune is the ultimate reward for long and faithful service.

Hides

FORMULA for curing deer skin.

Request:—"I would like to get a little imformation on some parts of taxidermy. Can you give me the formula for making the pickle for deer skin other than the salt and alum? It is made with sulphuric acid, alum, salt and water. Can you give me some advice on making the bodies for squirrel mounting? Have seen some of the bodies with the head and tail made up instead of using the wire and stuffing system. Is there another way of keeping squirrel skins soft?"—THOMAS F. DONATO, Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Reply, by Mr. Seth W. Bullock:—For a solution for the curing of deer hides other than the salt and alum bath, I give as follows:

Two pounds of ordinary salt to each gallon of water. Stir until all salt is dissolved or until the water has taken up all the salt it will Five gallons of this will take care of the average skin nicely but be sure to have enough. To each five gallons of this brine add four ounces of commercial sulphuric acid and stir in well. This mixture is poison and should be treated as such.

About your squirrels: You will find that the wire and stuffing method is the only right one to use. It is by far the most satisfactory. It is the one used by professionals.

No skin can be kept soft unless it is tanned.

Stamp

THIS three-center is now worth a pretty penny.

Request:—"I have a 3-cent United States stamp, apparently of the Sept., 1861, issue, which is perforated top and bottom and imperforated both sides. Gibbons does not quote such a variety and I have no specialized catalog available. Would you be good enough to advise me if it is a recognized variety and if so its approximate worth? I would take it to be an ordinary stamp trimmed but for the fact that it is wider than any other I have seen and has a margin of about 1½ m.m. on either side. Total width at widest part approximately 23 m.m."
—D. S. M. CLARK, Jamaica, B. W. I.

Reply, by Mr. H. A. Davis:—Replying to your letter relative to your 3-cent 1861 stamp imperforated at sides:

Scott's Specialized U. S. catalog lists this stamp as imperforate horizontally and priced at $175.00.* It is also listed imperforated.

Of course you understand that one can not be perfectly sure of its identity unless it is in a pair.

*Price used. Not priced unused.

French Foreign Legion

RECENTLY this famous fighting organization has been the subject of wide publicity, both favorable and derogatory. Let the truth balance as it may, this fact however is clear: that in its century of service, it has maintained a standard of effectiveness possibly unexcelled by any other military force.

Request:—"I am anxious to obtain some history of the French Foreign Legion. I will be very glad if you can assist me in obtaining such data."
—R. M. TAYLOR, Christiansburg, Va.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—The French Foreign Legion is one of the most interesting and effective fighting organizations in the world. And yet I do not believe that a complete history of the Legion has ever been published in English. There are many books which describe the Legion from one viewpoint or another and tell of many experiences of members of the Legion. From time to time rather sketchy histories of the organization have been published in the newspapers or magazines. But I have never seen anything like a complete history in English. Undoubtedly a satisfactory history could be obtained in French.

While I can not refer you to a complete history of the Legion, the following facts concerning its history may be of some interest to you. Traditionally the Legion claims descent from organizations of French and English soldiers formed during the Crusades. In later periods of French history military units composed of men of one nationality were formed to fight under the French flag. Among these was a regiment of Swiss which won renown under Angereau in 1795 and brought about the formation of similar regiments of Poles and Italians who fought under Napoleon. At Waterloo no less than eight foreign regiments supported the fortunes of the Emperor. These included an Irish regiment.

The present Foreign Legion was organized in 1831 under a decree of King Louis Phillipe and so has an unbroken history of nearly 100 years. The original purpose, according to the decree, was to offer a refuge for "those foreigners who, by the troubled state of Europe have come within our borders, and whose presence, unemployed and harassed by necessity, may constitute a public danger." This throws light upon the custom long maintained of never allowing the Legion to serve in France but to keep it always at work guarding colonial frontiers. The custom was broken during the World War, however, when the necessity for trained troops brought the Legion to the Western Front where a number of Americans served in its ranks.

In the course of its century of service the Legion has fought in India and Mexico, in Dahomey and Tunisia, in China and the Crimea and on many other fronts. It is a tradition in the Legion that it has led more forlorn hopes than any other fighting organization in the world's history. Each recruit is taught that a Legionnaire must die rather than retreat or surrender, and the Legion boasts of the number of times that it has ignored orders for a retreat and remained on the field until it was won or every man sacrificed.

At the present time the Legion consists of some 20,000 officers and men, organized into four regiments of infantry and cavalry. Its headquarters are at Sidi-bel-Abbes in Algeria and its battalions are serving in Algeria, Morocco, Syria and in far away Indo-China. Holding these outposts of France the Legionnaire is nearly always on active field service. Though his opponents are more or less wild tribesmen he has seen some severe fighting since the World War.

Here are some books which may be of interest to you if you have not already seen them:

"Life in the Legion from a Soldier's Point of View," by Frederic Martyn, Everett & Co., London, 1911. An excellent account of the period before the World War.

"Soldiers of the Legion," by John Bowe, Press of the Peterson Linotyping Co., Chicago, 1918. Experiences during the World War.

"The Bugle Sounds," by Major Zinovi Pechkoff, D. Appleton & Co., New York, 1926; and "A Royal Adventurer in the Foreign Legion," by a member of the royal family of Denmark, Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926. Both of these deal with the Legion since the War.

Fencing

THE BEST manual for self-instruction.

Request:—"Could you please let me know a good book to get with instructions on fencing?"

—ALFRED S. WILSON, Lone Pine, California.

Reply, by Mr. John V. Grombach:—The very best manual of fencing available at the present time covering the modern sport is the Amateur Fencers League of America, Manual of Fencing.

This book can be obtained for $1.00 by writing to the A. F. L. A., Care Mr. John Allaire, 25 Broad St., New York City.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville. Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, operating cost, legislative restrictions, public safety.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 429 Wilson Ave., Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign LIEUT. GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, Marine Corps Fleet Reserve, Box 1042, Medford, Oregon.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 911 S. Union Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies).* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 60 East 34 Street, New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, 2121 New York Ave., N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documented steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean* (*Siberian Waters*).—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 5316 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., Tyler Hotel, Louisville, Ky. and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 6 *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and O. E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.*—W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, [illegible] *Adventure*.

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Via Box 335, Azusa, California.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*.

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentine and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, Marlboro, Maine, c/o L. L. Brown.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, 236 Fox Ave., San José, Calif.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Popular Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"). 1805 Stroh Building, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.* Also yachting.—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw. Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

★**Canada Part 9** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin and Hudson Bay mineral belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska. Also mountain climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 3009 Crest Trail, Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—H. F. ROBINSON, Albuquerque, Box 445, New Mexico.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colo. and Wyo.*—FRANK EARNEST, Keyport, New Jersey.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Mina, Nevada.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*.

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Mo. and Ark. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*.

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Minn., and Lake Michigan.* Also clamming, natural history legends.—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure*.

Middle Western U. S. Part 4 *Mississippi River.* Also routes, connections, itineraries; river-steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions about working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears.—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa.

Middle Western U. S. Part 5 *Lower Mississippi River, (St. Louis down), Atchafalaya across La. swamps, St. Francis River, Arkansas Bottoms.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Middle Western U. S. Part 6 *Great Lakes.* Also seamanship, navigation, courses, distances, reefs and shoals, lights and landmarks, charts; laws, fines, penalties, river navigation.—H. C. GARDNER, 3302 Daisy Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Eastern U. S. Part 1 *Eastern Maine. For all territory east of the Penobscot River.*—H. B. STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 2 *Western Maine. For all territory west of the Penobscot River.*—DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me.

Eastern U. S. Part 3 *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I. and Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 1332, New Haven, Conn.

Eastern U. S. Part 4 *Adirondacks, New York.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S. Part 5 *Maryland and District of Columbia.* Also historical places.—LAWRENCE EDMUND ALLEN, 23 Arlington Court, Charleston, West Virginia.

Eastern U. S. Part 6 *Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C. Fla. and Ga. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard.* Also sawmilling, saws.—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care *Adventure*.

Eastern U. S. Part 7 *Appalachian Mountain south of Virginia.*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for five cents.*)
✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with International Reply Coupon for three cents.*)

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Announcing

the Feature of the Year!

D'ARTAGNAN

A three-part sequel to "The Three Musketeers", in which the grandest swashbucklers of all fiction and of all time continue their breath taking escapades, amid the desperate intrigues and mad loves of the world's most brilliant court.

From a fragmentary manuscript

By ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Adapted by

H. BEDFORD-JONES

And Ten Other Royally Good Stories

Novelettes by

MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON ROBERT CARSE

Short Stories by

JAMES STEVENS F. ST.MARS RAYMOND S. SPEARS
RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
MURNEY L. MINTZER GUTHRIE BROWN ERNEST HAYCOX

HUDSON RIVER BRACKETED

by Edith Wharton

"By the time he was nineteen Vance Weston had graduated from the college of Euphoria, Illinois, where his parents then lived, had spent a week in Chicago, invented a new religion, and edited for a few months a college magazine called *Getting There*, to which he had contributed several love poems and a series of iconoclastic essays. He had also been engaged for a whole week to the inspirer of the poems, a girl several years older than himself called Floss Delaney . . . ." . . . and then Vance Weston went to visit some distant relatives in a tiny village near New York. In this little town which had marked time while the Middle West was advancing he learnt for the first time of the wealth of literature about which he knew nothing, of the traditions that hovered over the lovely old houses—and he met Heloise Spear.

You can begin this important novel by one of America's foremost novelists in DELINEATOR for September.

And in this same issue you will find distinctive stories by such famous authors as Konrad Bercovici, Sarah Addington, Kathleen Norris, Stephen Vincent Benet, "Elizabeth", (the Countess Russell) and thoughtful articles by well-known people.

Delineator

10c On sale at all newsstands and in the pattern departments of progressive merchants throughout the country 10c

ADVENTURE
ISSUE, 1928
No. 6
LXVII
25 Cents

Identify the Lifetime pen by this white dot

Three strong carbon copies is a Lifetime° specialty

No two leaves could be more exactly alike than the clear-cut duplicates that the Lifetime pen makes. It is a carbon-copy specialist. Its master-built iridium nib will easily make three clear replicas of your personal letters and notes. Yet the Lifetime pen is ideal for the Palmer system of handwriting because its ink flow is instantaneous, never failing and responds to the lightest touch. Guaranteed unconditionally for a lifetime, this pen of unbreakable radite and brilliant gold is a faithful servant as well as a thing of beauty. Buy a Lifetime and get the carbon-copy habit—especially for confidential matters.

"Lifetime" pen in green or black, $8.75, Ladies, $7.50—pencil, $4.25
De Luxe "Lifetime" pen, $10, pencil, $5. Others lower

At better stores everywhere

Onyx or Italian Marble Lifetime Desk Fountain-pen Set, $11

SHEAFFER'S

PENS · PENCILS · SKRIP

W. A. SHEAFFER PEN COMPANY · FORT MADISON, IOWA, U.S.A.
New York · · Chicago · · San Francisco
W. A. Sheaffer Pen Co. of Canada, Ltd. · Toronto, Ont.—60-62 Front St., W.
Wellington, N. Z. · Sydney, Australia · London—199 Regent St.

°Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

Skrip, successor to ink. 15 and 25 cents

DONALD DENTON

SCAN COURTSEY OF
EXCITER